

CRABBING *from page 1A*

which, along with being the main type of crabbing in Oregon, has also been named one of the most dangerous occupations in the country.

Crabbing comes with uncertainty every day. Amber says the ocean can be calm one minute, and dangerously rocky the next, “We’ve been out before where I didn’t know if we were going to make it back in.”

So why continue to crab with so much uncertainty and danger? For the Novellis, it’s what brought their family together — and continues to fulfill Amber through run-

ning Novelli’s Crab and Seafood.

Dungeness crab, the kind of crab Amber and Kyle catch, makes the most revenue for Oregon out of all commercially fished marine life. Only five counties in Oregon — Clatsop, Lincoln, Coos, Curry and Tillamook— account for 96 percent of total commercial fishing employment. Yet Oregon is the top producer worldwide for Dungeness crab, according to commercialfishing.org.

Dungeness crab is integral to Oregon’s fishing industry, and even though it comes with risks, Amber and Kyle continue to devote their lives

to bringing the crab to the Florence community.

“It’s kind of funny to have your goal in life be to bring people fresh fish,” Amber says.

In the past, Kyle was a carpenter by profession. He always loved to fish but didn’t know how to make it a sustainable career. “I told him ‘If you love to fish and you can make money doing this, then let’s do it!’ He said yes, and so we did it,” says Amber.

The Novellis bought a truck with an overhead camper and a small pull-behind, dory-like boat and together started going up and down the Oregon coast fishing. During this time they lived in Newport. “We

did really good our first year there, so we traded that boat in and got The Midnight,” Amber says. But it was on a trip about seven years ago with their friends that they discovered crabbing.

“They needed a baiter so I volunteered. I had never even touched a crab,” Amber says. After that trip, they bought The Aquarius, which is their current crabbing boat. When they saw a houseboat for sale in Florence, they decided to take a chance. “We saw [Novelli’s] for sale and we were like ‘let’s make them come to us,’” Amber said.

Up to then, she and Kyle had been driving their catch to Bend, Ore., where they had set up a customer base to sell their fish. However, fishing out of Newport and Coos Bay then loading the truck and driving to Bend to sell to everyone was beginning to be exhausting.

“I’ll never forget the very first day that we opened here in Florence. Mike Bones came down in his outfit from the casino and he had a group with him and they were just so welcoming. The whole town just started coming down and it was all these nice, nice people!” Amber recalls. “It’s like having a house on the water where everyone just comes to visit and it’s like everyone ends up turning into your personal friend.

“The people here are just the nicest I’ve ever met.”

Crabbing has continued to

bring the Novelli family together. “It means a lot as a parent to have your kids be proud of what you do,” Amber says. “When they come to help, they have these proud smiles on their face as they’re selling our crab.”

Amber and Kyle opened Novelli’s in 2014 and, two years later, Amber entered the Florence Area Chamber of Commerce’s chowder contest.

“The first two years we were just selling whatever fish Kyle caught and I was playing around with the soup. And that just became a world of its own. I had been playing around with a crab bisque recipe. Then I decided to add potatoes and someone said that it wasn’t bisque anymore, it was chowder — so I went with that,” Amber adds.

Her crab chowder won two years of the chamber’s chowder festival in October and, since then, has become important for Novelli’s to sustain them through the crabbing season closures.

Crabbing season begins Dec. 1 and continues until August. Amber keeps Novelli’s open during the months in between to sell chowder and the fish Kyle catches. They also do bay crabbing, which starts in September. But it’s still not enough to sustain them sometimes.

“I remember the last couple years the crabbing season got postponed almost until January or February. And by then ... everyone’s dead broke

because you have no income,” Amber says. “You get to the point where you ask the Salvation Army to help with your electricity so it devastates all of us. It’s something you just can’t get away from. Everyone’s waiting for Dec. 1, then it gets postponed. So fishermen have probably the worst Christmases ever.”

This is another obstacle crabbers face in the crabbing industry. Aside from the dangerous ocean conditions they encounter, crabbers have to deal with the bio toxin domoic acid. This toxin is produced by a type of algae called Pseudo-nitzschia australis, and the toxin accumulates in small fish and shellfish, like crab.

Currently, researchers are studying what triggers algae to produce domoic acid. The bio toxin can make humans very sick if a person eats the affected shellfish, which is why it has delayed the start of crabbing season annually throughout various parts of the Oregon coast over the past four years. This year’s 2018-19 crabbing season was delayed until Jan. 15 from the Columbia area to Cape Arago — with Florence situated between the two — due to domoic acid, according to the Oregon Department of Agriculture.

Inside Novelli’s there is a large blue tank where Amber keeps her crab, but it’s only so big. The couple brings in enough crab to fill up the tank, but her crab pots have to stay out in the ocean where the crab can survive. If the river had more saltwater, then she could drop the crab pots right outside her restaurant.

“That’s the other part of why I’m closed during the winter. Because my pump is out there. If there’s a lot of rain I get way too much freshwater. It’s brackish enough to keep my crabs alive for the short time that they’re in [the tank], but if I get a lot of rain during the winter, it would just kill them because [the water] would be too fresh,” Amber says. “That’s what makes crabbing a little bit harder here.”

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