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NEWS - LOCAL

Tuesday, Feb. 17, 2009

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Have some fun and support the 'Claws'

Stone crabs to be featured at Festival

By CARL MARIO NUDI - cnuudi@bradenton.com

CORTEZ — You may want to learn all about stone crabs or you may just want to eat them.

You can do both this weekend at the 27th annual Cortez Commercial Fishing Festival.

This year the fishing community on the tiny peninsula that hugs the northern shore of Sarasota Bay will celebrate its heritage with "Claws," or all things crabs — stone and blue.



FILE PHOTO PAUL VIDELA/pvidela@bradenton.com. Visitors to last year's Cortez Commercial Fishing Festival Cortez Village enjoy food, drink, friends and a picturesque view of Cortez. The 27th annual event will be held Saturday and Sunday in the historic fishing village.

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member and office manager of A.P. Bell Fish Co., said there will be a focus on educating the public on the stone crab industry.

There will be illustrative panels on how to build crab traps, how to trap crabs and how to cook them.

This will all be next to the stacks of crab traps the local fishermen use on a regular basis.

"People don't really know how much crab comes through the Cortez fishing docks," Bell said. "During the season several tons a day are harvested."

Bryan Ibasfalean, who was raised in Cortez and has been a commercial fisherman since his early teens, will produce a video on the stone crab industry that will be shown to festival goers throughout the weekend.

"Stone crabbing is tedious work," Ibasfalean said. "You can pull 400-500 traps a day, and you'll have 50 with nothing in them."

"Every year when we start planning the festival, we have discussions about what message we want to send," said Allen Garner, president of Florida Institute for Saltwater Heritage, or FISH, the organizers of the very popular event.

"We want to showcase a facet of our industry every year," Garner said, "and we've never done anything about crabbing."

Along with the artists and nautical crafts booths, about 20 food vendors will be set up from 10a.m. to 6-p.m. Saturday and Sunday offering a variety of seafood, meats, and desserts.

Visitors also will be entertained both days, with bands, dancers, singers and much more.

But the center of attention will be on the crab.

Garner said Cortez fishermen have been harvesting stone crabs since the 1960s, but blue crabs have been part of their catch since the community was settled in the late 1800s.

Karen Bell, a festival organizing committee member and office manager of A.P. Bell Fish Co., said there will be a focus on educating the public on the stone crab industry.

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He has posted on the Internet several of the videos on fishing at www.ez-fishfinder.com.

The annual festival is the major fundraiser for FISH, which uses the monies for rehabilitation of the FISH Preserve, a 95-acre mangrove wetland just east of the village. It also goes to purchase more land and to fund educational activities.

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