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## A passion for the sea

### Family shares love of fishing the Gulf

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"You don't have to live here long before you realize that the weather on the Gulf of Mexico can change on a dime," says Dana Smith, captain of the fishing boat Just Be Claws. "You need to be prepared and equipped for any situation that may arise." From left are Dana Smith, Shelly Smith, Joshua Smith and Darci Knecht.

JOE DUBE/Special to the Chronicle

Joe Dube

Special to the Chronicle



Bringing fresh seafood from the Gulf of Mexico to the dinner table is not a simple task. In fact, it can be downright dangerous.



Fishermen constantly face danger inherent in the job — rough, unpredictable seas, high winds, heavy fog, rain and choppy waves. Being swept overboard and drowning is a real threat.



The tools of the trade — nets, cables, cages — can be just as dangerous.

It is easy to understand why fishing is considered one of the most perilous jobs in America.

Dana Smith and his wife, Shelly — who own and operate Shelly's Seafood in Old Homosassa — have been meeting those challenges for more than 30 years. Their family-owned business is housed in a 100-year-old building on the Homosassa River. They have grown their business over the years, from selling shrimp and stone crab out of small coolers to a thriving, full-scale fish market.

Each day begins before sun-up at 5:30 a.m. On average, Dana's crew may pull over 1,000 traps.



Crabbing is cyclical. Quite often traps must be moved to obtain a better catch — an often laborious and monotonous task.



"Crab seasons are less than predictable," Dana Smith said. "You may have 2,000-pound catches one day and not even pay for bait on the next day."



During the summer months a crew of three to four will fish for as many as six days at a time, not returning until their coolers are full. Dana's crew will fish for local grouper, snapper and other saltwater fish.



Dana's son Joshua shares the same passion for the sea as his father.

"The appeal is that every day is an adventure — a far cry from your typical 9-to-5 job," he said.

All fish caught is prepared and sold fresh at Shelly's. In addition to local fish and shellfish such as stone crab, blue crab, oysters, clams and shrimp, Shelly ensures that quality imported seafood including yellow fin tuna, salmon, cod and sea bass is available for her customers.

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