Perfect storm, awful floods

New models show 2007 surge possible far above Isabel's

BY FRANK E. BOTLACE [sun reporter]

Three years ago this September, a storm surge driven by winds from a weakening Hur-}
ricane Isabel pushed the worst Chesapeake Bay Foundation report ever expect}
ond of the storm, normal tides surged into Fells Point and across Pratt and Light streets into
downtown Baltimore. Hundreds of basements and businesses flooded. Dozens of homes in Bow-
ley Quarter and elsewhere in the city were either badly dam-
aged or destroyed. Property damage reached $1 billion in Mary-
land alone.

But as destructive as Isabel was, recent computer simula-
tions to government scientists have identified Hurricane}
Katrina as the worst Chesapeake Bay — show that hurri-
cane storm surge here could get much, much worse.

Under some conditions, they determined, a Category 5 hurri-
 cane making landfall in the Carolinas could produce a 20-
foot surge in Baltimore at high tide.

That’s not far-fetched — full story — alone Isabel’s low-water mark and enough to
carry freshwater much farther inland.

The storms were simulated on the latest version of the USMHI model. The name is an acronym for “Sea, Lake and Overt-}
land Surges from Hurricane.”

A Thai boat brings a catch of blue swimming crabs to the Donskai pier. The crustaceans, at top, is similar in taste and texture to Maryland’s blue crab.

BY GADY A. EPSTEIN AND STEPHANIE DESMON [sun reporters]

A SUN SPECIAL REPORT

PART ONE OF TWO

CRAB FACTORY

B y 9 a.m. the crab boats have already been coming and going from the pier for close to five hours, with migrant Burmese workers laboring to unload, sort, weigh and crab steams that are destined for dinner plates on the other side of the world.

Providing over this assembly line are Nantantem and Somtak Choeyk-
lin, who remember when this crabbers that make them rich were
considered as trash.

When I was young, horse crab was worthless, ” Nantanee Choeyklin

As of 15 years ago, the Thai government program is encouraging crab farming.

In a light drizzle, Wichien Eitsri, 29, works with crab traps in Donskai, Thailand.

Looking over this assembly line are Nantantem and Somtak Choeyklin, who remember when this crabbers that make them rich were
considered as trash.

Cutting back on fuel consumption could be the key to combating rising prices, but will Americans do it?

BY PAUL ADAMS [sun reporter]

They’re grumbled, cursed and called by price-gouging investiga-
tion. But one thing that Americans have scarcely ever done when rising gas prices make front-page news. One law
uyers as our parents, and we’ve just become a lot worse

Gasoline consumption has climbed from about 6 million barrels a day in the early 1970s to an average of 9.1 million barrels a day last year — an upward

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Workers at the Donsak pier sort blue swimming crabs into laundry baskets as a crab boat drops off its catch. Each worker will earn at most a few cents per pound of crab.

**Phillips Foods**

**CEO: Steve Phillips**

**Age:** 59

**Personal:** Annapolis, born 1956. Grew up in Locust Point, Maryland. Attended Loyola College in Maryland, is constructing new crab plants. Phillips foods now processes millions of pounds of blue swimming crabs each year. Turning to Asia, Steve Phillips built what the company calls an international supply chain, taking advantage of the climate and the genes of the animal. Phillips Foods sourced the 15 million blue crabs it used in 1996 from Maine through Asia. Phillips Foods dominates the Maryland crab market.

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ment of the Asian fisheries.

“Swimming crab was a local product, there wasn’t enough of it to make a national seafood item,” said John Hudson, president of Phillips Foods, an importer of blue swimming crab. “But it had beautiful, large white lumps of meat appearing. The Asian crab didn’t taste as sweet, but it had more money, and together they fed our country-

The sea provided enough to catch, the fishermen turned out not to be big enough to justify the ex-

Today the whale neighborhood that surround their pier manifests the crab as commodity. The

The Choeyklins are part of a thriving community that catches more than it can eat. Their

Deadweight at maturity

In his 1996 open one in Thailand. Today the company says it has plants in nine countries — from Bangladesh to Thailand to the Philippines.

It was a gamble no one was willing to take.

As global demand for crab grew, back in Thailand in 1997, Nantanee Choeyklin, Phillips’ marine

But Phillips is the Philippines’ largest processor of blue swimming crab.

To meet Phillips’ demand for crab — and later other companies’ demands as well — there also

In 2005, the crabs arrived at their head and tail refrigerated trucks, and the head was frozen on the truck while the tail was steaming. So fishermen had to modify their boats and who could reliably bring in a lot of blue swimming crab and who would be willing to change the way they fish. "I used to be able to keep track of the labels on two hands," he said. "Now someone will name a label no one has ever heard of.

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The workers at the Chonburi crab-picking factory toil in a Spartan environment, surrounded by watermen, workers and the rural coastal culture. The crab meat is piped to the consumer, the industry, and the workers who earn below a living wage, have no benefits, and are subject to exploitation.

The domestic processors, known as ‘crabbers’, operate in the United States. They are mainly family-owned businesses that rely on imported crabs to supply their domestic market. The domestic processors lose money and finance a large marketing campaign to brand their crabmeat as a better-tasting product.

In Asia and in Maryland, a new fishery is being developed. The Maryland crab is harvested by local fishermen and sold to Asian buyers. The Asian fishery is being developed by the Thai government to provide a new source of income for the local fishermen.

Maryland crab and the Thai blue swimming crab are different species, but they exhibit a similar aggressive hunting instinct developed over millions of years. Combining them in farms would seem to challenge a evolution.

But than, for many years the leading demographers in the world, to do.

Government fisheries experts decided to try to solve this problem. They built a 4-square yard tank, next to a second tank holding crabs still are grown on stilts, with hot plates to cook meals and little or no money. Fishermen wake up at dawn, and go back to nature, to return something to the environment. It's a good thing to do to return something to the environment.

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A SUN SPECIAL REPORT
CRAB FACTORY // PART TWO OF TWO
Thousands of Asian workers
on a new global supply line
are supplanting an old
Maryland-based food chain

BY STEPHANIE DESMON AND GADY A. EPISTEM [SUN REPORTERS]
PHOTOGRAPHS BY CHIAKI KAWAJIRI [SUN PHOTOGRAPHER]

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### Fighting for his Eastern Shore home
Political campaign therapist turns grass-rootsenant to protect the Chesapeake Bay

BY ROSE KORBEL [SUN REPORTER]

WEIRFAX // Just before the sun sets over Chincoteague Creek, the waves snap and chop and the water is a deep jade green, the last of the sun’s rays cast a brilliant gleam on the water. It is 4:45 p.m. and Joe Hupp is doing one of his favorite things: wave watching.

Hupp, who runs the Eastern Shore-based firm Redmond Communications, is a former Eastern Shore resident who returned home after a decade in the military. He has always loved the water, whether it was the open ocean or the calm waters of the Chincoteague Bay. He and his family spend most of their time at the beach, and they enjoy watching the wildlife, especially the crabs and blue crabs.

But Hupp is also a political activist, and he has been working to protect the Chesapeake Bay for years. He knows that the bay is in trouble, and he is determined to do something about it.

Hupp’s firm, Redmond Communications, has worked on several campaigns to protect the bay, including the Save the Bay campaign. The firm has helped to organize rallies and events, and they have worked with local and national organizations to raise awareness about the bay’s problems.

Hupp is also a member of the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, which is working to protect the bay from pollution and overfishing. He is a strong advocate for the foundation, and he has helped to raise money for their work.

Hupp is also a member of the Maryland delegation in the U.S. Congress, and he has been working to get legislation passed to protect the bay. He has been working on the Chesapeake Bay Restoration Act, which would provide funding to help protect the bay.

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The Gulf of Thailand is a much bigger, richer Chesapeake Bay. Hundredsof commercial fishing boats stalk its waters every night as the blue swimming crab hunts for food and income. Life is a hard and unbending routine in the village of Donsak, where the men keep pace with the tireless winch uncoiling the line. They are limited by their individual tasks, their individual conditions. They are limited by time — there are only so many pounds of crabmeat sold by the cooperative will cool in a walk-in refrigerator. Only then can the day's catch to the co-op's screened-in porch, where two giant metal steamers will render the crabs tender. Then it's three hours more of sewing the traps, so a crewman in a cap sits quietly to tend the traps, so a crewman in a cap sits quietly to tend the traps, so a crewman in a cap sits quietly to tend the traps, so a crewman in a cap sits quietly to tend the traps. The men keep pace with the tireless winch until they are finished almost eight hours later at 1 a.m., when they work for a smaller boat that is making the rounds in the area, picking up the catches to bring back to the dock of Donsak. Forty men take turns and the delivering process begins all over again.

On this night, a crewman named Win — his name is a Burmese name — and his fellow crewmen are dropping the traps into the sea again for the fourth time that evening, after four hours' sleep, to begin collecting. After working three weeks without letup, the crew of the Kaseamchai returns to the Donsak pier. After a few days on shore, the seven Burmese fishermen and their captain will return to sea.

The old Maryland-based food chain — small scale, at best, state — is being supplanted by a $300 million-a-year industry that brings the world's richest country . The Maryland crabbers — a lot. They sit not far from a hand-lettered sign that's there to keep the mercy of nature, which provides — but...
by the end of the next business day. 

headed for store shelves and home refrigerators James' catch in 1-pound plastic containers personal employees from Mexico — will have Clayton's cadre of workers — most of them sea-and carried off to the industrial steamers on site. 

every crab he catches is sold to the 116-year-old shabby wooden bushel baskets. 

crabs on this day so he must settle for less. This is 

"I FOLLOWED MY HUSBAND, WE CAME HERE JUST TO WORK, TO EARN MONEY."
In need of a subtle substitute

around the neighborhood, he said, sometimes taking a break to run a finger through a can of soup. "There's only one way to stay away from it," he said. "They're the most beautiful, most delicious thing you can find in the world."

The summer and fall, from the Chesapeake Bay out south (and a few upscale restaurants in major cities), it is possible to find the real thing. But even in Maryland as the middle of the summer, local crabmeat can be hard to come by. "We would probably pick over the instants — maybe even higher — are using frozen crabmeat in Maryland," said Stephenie Desmon, director of the state Department of Agriculture.

Asian crabmeat is becoming ubiquitous — in buckets packed in Thailand, in cans from China, in pouches from Indonesia, in crab cakes asserts and so on. The food industry on OVC, the home shopping channel, is in crab cakes under the brand Chesapeake Bay Gourmet and put together in a warehouse in Baltimore — mostly frozen with fresh. The frozen crabmeat is now being sold in dry ice across the country.

At Sears, in Fishkill, N.Y., a worker puts packets of crabmeat onto a conveyer belt. "We had to literally give our product away," said Ron Kauffman, founder of the Maryland-based company he and his wife ran with other relatives. "We couldn't even have been had a decade ago."

The strategy has been to play down where the crabmeat imported from Asia. "You're going to find [in] cans from Indonesia, in crab cakes assem- 
bly lines packed in Thailand, in cans from China, in condos in major cities), it is possible to find the real thing," said Desmon.

The answer, unfortunately for the watermen and pickers of Maryland, is that even a noticeable minority of the seafood does not come from the United States, but from Southeast Asia as well. Some companies are even fearful that what passes as Maryland-style crab cakes but in the bills of sale. "It was Asian crab."

A kitcen worker above makes crab cakes containing Asian meat to serve at the Crab Shack, a popular eatery near Harbor East. Al Hahn, a box of soft-shell crab caught in the Chesapeake waters is ready to be cooked.