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Series: MUNCHMOBILE 2006

**Decidedly fishy****Munchers troll the Jersey backroads for seafood**By PETER GENOVESE  
STAR-LEDGER STAFF

Hanging out at what looked like New Jersey's largest yard sale. Driving the back way from Newark to Stone Harbor. Eating from paper plates at a lifeguard station. Composing haikus while waiting for our appetizers. Getting attacked by seagulls.

Just another day on the Munchmobile.

"Did you know scrod is not a fish?" asked Gregory Saggau, owner of Gregory's Seafood Market & Restaurant in Manchester.

Some dictionaries notwithstanding, he's right; scrod is not a species of fish but a size designation for cod, haddock and pollock.

"People don't eat good fish," Saggau grumbled. "There's so much chemicals and crap on food these days."

This being the Munchmobile, we were determined to eat good fish, no matter how long the journey lasted. Our mission was for quality crabcake and fish sandwiches. Our crew consisted of six hardy Munchers, who had signed up for considerably more than a three-hour tour. We started at the yard sale, ended up within sight of Ocean City and in between were set upon by bloodthirsty seagulls. The only thing missing was Tippi Hedren, frantically clutching her hair. Where's Rod Taylor when you need him? The movie - we mean story - begins now.

**My Two Sons, Manalapan**

Walk past the bins of cosmetics, the mountains of "first quality" socks, the tables of watches and jewelry, the rows of carved elephants and ...

Wait, a minute, isn't this supposed to be a Munchmobile trip?

It is. We were at the venerable Englishtown Auction Sales, and we were hungry. Tipster Gail Weisblat had told us about a certain food stall inside the auction and, ever-inquisitive, the Big Dog checked it out.

"Born Charity Hospital, Savannah, Ga., 1947," Rita Simmons-Sanders said by way of introduction. She and her two sons, Rasheed and Altriq, run My Two Sons.

It's not much to look at. Tables hug a wall, a floor fan does double-time, and the menu is a plain mimeographed sheet. But if there's one thing you learn in the Munch world, it's that appearances can be deceiving; holes-in-the-wall often come off better than fussy, fancy restaurants.

The fried catfish sandwich - plump, crispy and juicy - got the day off to a super start. Bruce Bobbins later would call it "the best sandwich of the day, hands down!"

Close behind was the whiting sandwich, fine and firm. The cole slaw and potato salad: first-rate. The creamy homemade tartar sauce, definitely not your usual white glop, was even better. What's in it?

"A touch of the South," Rasheed Simmons said, smiling.

Whole crabcakes were not available, but we tried some crab balls - spicy, crunchy mini-crab cakes.

Happy, we walked past the watches, widgets and whimsy - anyone need an Amazing Frogman? - and headed for the van.

**Shore Fresh Seafood Market, Point Pleasant**

Rich Brecka is a former CIA operative. No, not that CIA, the other one, the Culinary Institute of America. The chef worked around the world, then opened Shore Fresh in a former ice cream parlor six years ago.

Fresh fish and shellfish glisten on plastic-sheet-covered mounds of ice. Littlenecks. Lobster tails. Prawn. Sea scallops. Salmon. Guest checks are taped to a giant lobster claw, from a 45-pounder. Fish kitsch - nets, paddles, pelicans - provide the decor.

It's summer; why not soup? Bobbins admired the lobster bisque's "enticing aroma," although Loryn Dagon, both a Muncher and a chef, found it salty. The New England clam chowder seemed "light on flavor - it needed more clam-itude," Dave Brooks chortled.

Roseann Micallef favored the fried flounder sandwich - "very simple and the fish was very fresh." One hit: the blackened tuna bites, enticingly spicy. "Woke me up better than an alarm clock," Bobbins

said. Another: the fried halibut sandwich. "Very well done, very nice," said Munchmobile photographer Tim Farrell.

Memorable: the celery-flecked, New England-worthy lobster roll sandwich. Forgettable: the cole slaw and tartar sauce. The crabcake sandwich was better than the crab balls at Rita's, but it fell short of crabcake nirvana.

#### **Gregory's Seafood Market & Restaurant, Manchester**

This seafood oasis is moored in an unlikely location, on a quiet stretch of Route 37 between Toms River and Lakehurst. But owner Gregory Saggau knows his fish and is only too happy to tell you so.

"People know so little about seafood," said the former seafood specialist for a series of Pathmark stores.

Sit inside or outside like we did, under canopy-covered benches. Make sure you try the dynamite dinner rolls, made specially for Saggau, and a dozen small, sweet Spinny Creek clams, from Maine. The oysters, harvested in New Jersey's own Barnegat Bay, were average. The New England clam chowder - more seasoned, more substance - was superior to Shore Fresh's version. The Old Bay-accented meaty crab soup might have been the day's best soup.

The two crabcakes - one a baked Maryland crabcake with about 90 percent crab - didn't distinguish themselves. The best item here came from the marine version of left field - Salmon Michelangelo, named after Saggau's son, Michael. The beautifully tender fish, topped with onions, rested atop scalloped potatoes. "Delicious," Dagon said. "If that were on a roll ..."

The pickle-dotted cole slaw was no match for My Two Sons' version. But Brooks found the shrimp sandwich "pretty impressive."

"Did you know there are 347 kinds of flounder?" Saggau asked.

The Munchmobile: continuing education at its finest.

#### **Back Bay Crabcakes, Stone Harbor**

Enter the flock of seagulls. No, not the '80s band ("I Ran," "Space Age Love Song"), but the bad-behaving birds who descended on us as we sat down to a sunset feast on the Stone Harbor beach. Hey, you feathery fiends, we have work to do here!

But let's back up a bit. Even in the anything-goes world of Jersey Shore dining, Back Bay is different. It's a tiny, screen-doored, takeout-only joint, with a range of appetizers, soups and entrees and one interesting twist. You pick up cooked foods from 5 p.m. on in season. When you call up, you're given the next available pickup time. Select that time or a later one. Show up and your food is ready.

"Our fish slept in the ocean last night" is one Back Bay slogan. Another: "Seafood with an attitude."

The day's best crabcake came here, although it still fell short of the group ideal. The "famous" lobster bisque, smooth and subtle, almost lived up to its billing. But the she-crab soup, peppery but not otherwise memorable, received a quick thumbs-down. "Spackle paste," Bobbins said bitinglly.

But Back Bay, delightfully different, is the kind of hole-in-the-wall we like, and we'd go back, for the Mediterranean salad, the littlenecks in butter and garlic, the mussels marinara and other dishes. Maybe the seagulls will be busy terrorizing folks in Avalon by that time.

#### **The Crab Trap, Somers Point**

This venerable Shore fishhouse was a planned Munchmobile stop several summers ago, but a three-hour wait scuttled our plans (we ended up at another fish restaurant and, unfortunately, the worst meal of the summer).

But it was less than a half-hour wait this time, and we sat down, composing hilarious and not-about-to-be-published-any-time-soon haikus. Most restaurant bread amounts to a half-baked idea. The Crab Trap offers coconut muffins: nice. The soups stood out, especially the Maryland crab soup, which Bobbins called "the absolute best soup of the day, tangy, tart, sweet, full-bodied." The Manhattan clam chowder, meaty and muscular, would end up on Micallef's favorites-of-the-day list. But Dagon found the creamy crab bisque "too pasty."

The restaurant calls its deluxe deviled crabcakes "our No. 1 seller for over 30 years," not to be confused with the clams casino, "our No. 1 seller." The deviled crab fared better than the more expensive crispy crabcakes, lump crabmeat in a Chardonnay cream sauce. "It's crabbier," Dagon said of the former. Best dish: the "whale" soft-shell crabs, stuffed with deviled crab.

"Dessert?" our waitress asked.

That would be a no. It was late, and we were two and a half hours from Newark. Hopefully, we would be able to dodge traffic, not to mention marauding seagulls, on the way home.

#### **This week's guest munchers**

##### **Bruce Bobbins, 47, Colonia**

Partner, Dan Klores Communications. At 5-foot-5, 142 pounds, calls himself a "lean, mean, eating machine." In his Munchmobile application, he made one promise: "not to belch too loud in mixed company."

Quote: "Give a man a fish, he eats for a day. Teach a man to fish, he eats for a lifetime. Take a man on the Munchmobile for fish, he eats for a week, has a lot more fun and gets his picture in the newspaper."

##### **Dave Brooks, 48, Caldwell**

Vice president, Beckerman Public Relations. Self-described foodie who says life is "one unending buffet, with a few breaks for sleep and work." Faithful Munchmobile Hotline tipster. "I ask not what my Munchmobile can do for me, I only ask what I can do for my Munchmobile."

Quote: "Thanks for taking me along. Now I can die in peace."

#### **Loryn Dagon, 46, Madison**

Chef at Gary's Wine & Marketplace in Madison. In their Munch application, Dagon, Hewitt and Micallef described themselves as "fun-loving gals with discriminating taste" who would welcome "a rare day out of the kitchen."

Quote: "Thanks for one of the most hysterical days of my career!"

#### **Amanda Hewitt, 25, East Orange**

Cheese expert at Gary's Wine & Marketplace in Madison. "A total dedicated employee," Dagon says. "When the walls come tumbling down, there's Amanda." If she had to take one cheese to her desert island, it would be an 18-month-old Gouda - "not real sharp, it goes with a heartier white or an easy-going red."

Quote: "The best part of the day was getting attacked by the seagulls!"

#### **Roseann Micallef, 47, Maplewood**

Cook at Gary's Wine & Marketplace in Madison. Also does corporate cooking in New York. "If selected," she said, "we promise to uphold the high standards of the Munchmobile by eating politely, mingling with the other Munchers and being fair in our food judgments."

Quote: "I really enjoyed riding in the Big Dog and eating my way across the Garden State!"

#### **Bob Nichnadowicz, 38, Roselle Park**

Computer technician for the Rutherford school district. Doesn't have a favorite, but "leans" toward seafood dishes. Not a big fan of cream sauces; thinks they're "yucky."

Quote: "You need someone like me to not only appeal to the computer geek demographic, but I'm also 6-5, and I'm not sure if you've had anyone that tall in the Munchmobile."

#### **Where we munched**

\* Back Bay Seafood, 8305 Third Ave., Stone Harbor; (609) 368-2022. Pickup hours for cooked food: 5 to 9 p.m. seven days a week in season; 5 to 8 p.m. out of season.

\* The Crab Trap, Somers Point Circle, Somers Point; (609) 927-7377. Hours: 11:30 a.m. to 10 p.m. Sunday through Friday; 11:30 a.m. to 11 p.m. Saturday. Web site: [www.thecrabtrap.com](http://www.thecrabtrap.com).

\* Gregory's Seafood Market & Restaurant, 2064 Route 37 West, Manchester; (732) 323-9105. Hours, Memorial Day through Labor Day: 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. Sunday through Thursday; 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. Friday and Saturday; hours vary rest of year.

\* My Two Sons, Englishtown Auction Sales, Manalapan; (732) 786-1900. Hours: 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday and Sunday.

\* Shore Fresh Seafood Market, 703-707 Bridge Ave., Point Pleasant; (732) 899-1300. Hours: 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Sunday through Thursday; 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. Friday and Saturday.

#### **Munch team favorites**

\* Bruce Bobbins: catfish sandwich, My Two Sons, Englishtown Auction, Manalapan; crabcake, Back Bay Seafood, Stone Harbor; crabcake, Maryland crab soup, Crab Trap, Somers Point; lobster roll sandwich, Shore Fresh Seafood Market, Point Pleasant; fried flounder sandwich, Gregory's Seafood Market & Restaurant, Manchester.

\* Dave Brooks: catfish sandwich, My Two Sons; crabcake, Back Bay Seafood; deviled crab, stuffed soft-shell crabs, Crab Trap; meaty crab soup, Gregory's Seafood Market & Restaurant.

\* Loryn Dagon: crabcake, Back Bay Seafood; stuffed soft-shell crabs, Crab Trap; catfish sandwich, My Two Sons; steamers, Gregory's Seafood Market & Restaurant.

\* Tim Farrell: catfish sandwich, My Two Sons; lobster roll, fried halibut sandwiches, Shore Fresh Seafood Market; crabcake, Back Bay Seafood.

\* Pete Genovese: crabcake, Back Bay Seafood; catfish sandwich, tartar sauce, My Two Sons; meaty crab soup, Gregory's Seafood Market & Restaurant; blackened tuna, Shore Fresh Seafood Market.

\* Amanda Hewitt: salmon Michelangelo, Gregory's Seafood Market & Restaurant; crabcakes, Back Bay Seafood; catfish, whiting sandwiches, My Two Sons.

\* Roseann Micallef: catfish, whiting sandwiches, My Two Sons; blackened tuna, flounder sandwich, Shore Fresh Seafood Market; meaty crab soup, steamers, Gregory's Seafood Market & Restaurant; crabcakes, Back Bay Seafood; crabcake, Crab Trap.

\* Bob Nichnadowicz: catfish sandwich, My Two Sons; lobster roll sandwich, Shore Fresh Seafood Market; meaty crab soup, fried flounder sandwich, Gregory's Seafood Market & Restaurant; crabcake, Back Bay Seafood; Maryland crab soup, deviled crab cake, Crab Trap.

#### **Top Dog**

We found good sandwiches at all our restaurants, although you had to go fishing a bit on the menus.

The day's best crabcake came at the takeout-only Back Bay Crabcakes in Stone Harbor; its counterpart at the Crab Trap was a close second. Liked the soups at Gregory's Seafood Market & Restaurant, and the lobster roll and halibut sandwiches at Shore Fresh. But in the end, the plainest joint impressed the most. Top Dog honors this week go to My Two Sons at the Englishtown Auction.

#### Letter of the week

Most dads really stink when it comes to passing the appreciation for food down to their kids. Mickey D's or BK does not constitute a meal out. With that in mind, I would like you to consider me and my 15-year-old son, Matty, as a Munchmobile team! I have two other sons, but Matty is my "eater." As lifelong New Jersey residents, my kids have been exposed to the best NJ has to offer when it comes to food. They know that Mario's in Clifton has the best thin pizza. B&W Bakery in Hackensack has the best crumb cake - in the world, not just New Jersey. Applegate's in Bloomfield for the best ice cream. Hot Grill in Clifton for the best Texas weiners. Hot Dog Johnny's in Buttzville for the best fries. And the list goes on ....

We travel cross-country almost every summer to see the best sites, but also get the best food - 2-inch-thick pork chops in Kentucky, crawdads in Mississippi, ribs in Memphis, chuckwagon dinners in Wyoming. My own pedigree is slinging grease at the Red Chimney restaurant on Route 3 in Clifton through college. Matty wants to go to the CIA - no, not as a spy, the Culinary Institute of America.

- Tom Lawrence, Pattenburg

#### Tell us where to go

Bring on the heat, we got the brain freeze! Tomorrow's trip promises cool, sweet relief for the sultriest weather. We're searching for great shakes - vanilla, chocolate, strawberry, peach, any flavor you want us to try. Who makes the best milkshakes? We'll go anywhere, and we don't care how hot it gets! Call the Munchmobile Hotline at (973) 392-1765 or e-mail to pgenovese@starledger.com

#### Up next

Next Friday, read the results of the summer's most eagerly awaited Munch mission, our search for great pizza. On Aug. 12, we hit the road for chicken wings. Who makes the best wings? Call the Munchmobile Hotline NOW!

#### T-shirt giveaway

Each week, we give away Munchmobile T-shirts to the first two people who answer our trivia question correctly. Last week's question: At which Munch stop this summer can you find air-fried onion rings? The answer: Simplee Delicious, Mine Hill. The winners: Amy McCann of TKTKTK and Carol Dinkowitz of Dover.

**This week's question:** What famous hot dog stand is across the street from the Great Falls? Call the Munchmobile Hotline; you must leave your name and phone number.

**PHOTO CAPTION:** 1. The lobster roll sandwich and fries fill the plate at Shore Fresh Seafood Market in Point Pleasant, housed in a former ice cream parlor.  
2. Rita Simmons-Sanders serves fish sandwiches at My Two Sons in the Englishtown Auction.  
3. As if finding the perfect crabcake was not hard enough, Munchers - shown here are Amanda Hewitt and Loryn Dagon - had to contend with aggressive seagulls in Stone Harbor.  
4. The soft shell crab sandwich was one of the highlights at Gregory's Seafood Market & Restaurant in Manchester.

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