



## 2008: The White Boot Brigade is on the march!

Deep in the teeming estuaries of Louisiana, one of the world's most productive seafood regions, a movement is afoot: the White Boot Brigade, a federation of commercial fishers and their supporters, fighting for the principles of fair trade, cultural preservation, sustainable fishing practices and America's freedom from inferior shrimp!

From the coastal marshes of the Bayou State, our foot soldiers, distinguished by the white rubber boots proudly worn on the decks of Louisiana fishing boats, are launching missions far from home. Their payload: plump, wild-caught Louisiana shrimp, plucked fresh from the water and delivered straight to the tables of discriminating diners across the country.

These are tough times for Louisiana's commercial shrimpers. Their numbers were dwindling even before Hurricanes Katrina and Rita struck the Gulf Coast in 2005, destroying entire fleets and much of Louisiana's commercial fishing infrastructure. According to Louisiana department of Wildlife and Fisheries statistics, the number of resident commercial fishers dropped from more than 22,000 in 1989 to just over

11,000 in 2007; the number of permits issued for shrimp trawls has similarly plummeted, from 7,734 in 1989 to 3,400 in 2006.

The shrimpers who have stuck it out have been buffeted by skyrocketing fuel costs and increased competition from overseas, where cheaper farm-raised shrimp, often produced with the help of antibiotics, artificial feed and government subsidies, have driven down prices at home. While struggling to put their lives back together after the hurricanes, Louisiana's shrimpers are being forced to come to terms with market forces beyond their control.

The White Boot Brigade is stepping up to the challenge. And serious though our mission may be, our sorties into the vast American marketplace are happy occasions, filled with the indomitable spirit of our shrimpers and the exceptional flavor of their harvest.

### Preserving Our Culture

For generations, fishing families made their living by hauling their catch straight to the dock and selling it to wholesale seafood distributors, an arrangement that worked well when fuel costs were low and shrimp prices relatively high. But the price of shrimp

at the dock has reached historic lows; even though the quality of Louisiana shrimp is far higher than that of imported shrimp, competition from overseas have hammered the market for domestic producers, threatening a distinctly Louisiana way of life.

That's where the White Boot Brigade comes in. Launched in 2001 by marketumbrella.org, a New Orleans-based nongovernmental organization that initiates and promotes the ecologies of local economies through a range of programs, the White Boot Brigade is helping shrimpers develop new business models, establish and maintain relationships with customers inside and outside Louisiana, and adopt practices that preserve both the state's precious seafood resources and a traditional South Louisiana lifestyle.

### Where We Have Been

After Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, marketumbrella.org expanded its local and regional focus for shrimp campaigns to New Orleans neighborhoods and nearby cities nationally. The White Boot Brigade's first global mission, in 2006, brought a squadron of shrimpers, chefs and supporters to New York City, where the Brigade landed a spot on NBC's "Today" show and their fresh, wild-harvested shrimp landed on the menus at several Manhattan restaurants, including Tabla, one of the restaurants run by the Union Square Hospitality

Group. Extending the campaign to the San Francisco Bay Area in the summer of 2007, the White Boot Brigade hosted cooking demonstrations and met customers at area restaurants, Williams-Sonoma at Union Square and the Google Farmers Market. The ongoing relationships forged in each city have helped our shrimpers build their customer bases and reach markets that extend well beyond the host cities.



The White Boot Brigade appearance on the Today show, June 2006.

“There's definitely been a lot of fear associated with eating shrimp, with much of it being farmed improperly, which leads to waste and land destruction,” says Kenny Belov, general manager at Fish. restaurant in Sausalito, which hosted the White Boot Brigade and continues to buy shrimp from one of its members, Lance Nacio. “Or, with wild shrimp, you have improper fishing techniques and bottom trawling. And these guys were able to explain to our customers how they are fishing, how their techniques are different, how their bycatch is almost nonexistent. All these points reassured my customers that this is something completely different.

“We buy our prawns from Lance, and that's the only prawns we will carry,” Belov continues. “If I couldn't get Lance's prawns then I just wouldn't have prawns on the menu. Gulf prawns in general are just fantastic, but the way Lance is freezing and handling his product makes a huge difference.”



## Our Product

The White Boot Brigade's arsenal consists of two weapons: Louisiana brown shrimp, harvested in summer, and white shrimp, which flourish in cooler fall months. What sets our shrimp apart are the brackish waters formed by the confluence of salty Gulf waters and the fresh rivers and streams that feed into it; the result is shrimp that are sweeter and more flavorful than farm-raised or ocean-caught varieties, with a texture that holds up to cooking. Thanks to fast-freezing technology, Louisiana shrimp are available

throughout the year and taste as good as the day they were caught.

## Our Practices

Commercial fishers' livelihoods depend on the preservation of Louisiana's coastal waters, and the White Boot Brigade helps ensure that shrimpers use good, sustainable fishing techniques that minimize bycatch and protect the life of the estuaries. Additionally, our troops have adopted shipping and handling practices that guarantee customers the highest level of taste and quality.

## Our Troops

### Ray and Kay Brandhurst, Four Winds Seafood

Lifelong commercial fisherman Ray Brandhurst and his wife, Kay, didn't just lose their home and boat to Hurricane Katrina; the storm also destroyed the couple's thriving Chalmette, Louisiana seafood shop and displaced its large base of customers. But the Brandhursts are rebuilding their business, with help from the White Boot Brigade.

"This industry is in deep, deep trouble," says Ray. "We're up against things we can't do much about as individuals. And our numbers are shrinking. We've lost half our fishermen since 2001. It's a dying trade, and the economics of it are driving us out of business. This is our heritage and culture here, and the sad thing is we're losing it really quickly.

"That's where the White Boot Brigade has been my salvation," he says. "It has allowed me to market our

shrimp and get a fair price — to keep my head above water and keep me going in this business."

Low-priced imports have dragged down the price of Louisiana shrimp, he says, "even though we have a far superior product than farm-raised shrimp. It's forced our product to get caught up in this low-priced commodities game, and it's not recognized for its true value.

"What I have experienced with the White Boot Brigade, in making these trips and meeting these chefs and sending them my product, is that it's not only helped my business but it's also helped their sales. Their customers come in requesting the shrimp.

"The chefs from New York have been with me since we made the trip. I feel good about it because my product is well received. They're happy with it, their customers are happy with it, and it allows me to make a little extra and keeps me going in this business.

"It's been a blessing. It's been a remarkable opportunity for us to be able to market our product, which otherwise I don't think we would ever have been able to do. Probably the biggest hurdle in the whole equation is marketing, especially when you're trying to market out of state. The best thing you can get is face-to-face contact, shake that person's hand, and the White Boot Brigade has been our avenue to do that."

[Fourwindsseafood.com](http://Fourwindsseafood.com)



## Fair Trade Begins at Home

The combination of low prices for shrimp sold dockside and high fuel prices has already forced many commercial fishers out of the business; others are holding out hope that conditions will change, while continuing to do business as they always have — hauling in as much as they can catch, and unloading it at the docks. The White Boot Brigade is forging a better path: by encouraging fishers to be more selective, while educating the rest of the country



Table chef Floyd Cardoz serves up Louisiana shrimp at the Food Network's 2006 Shrimp Cocktail in NYC.

about the superiority of Gulf shrimp, our troops are able to command fair market prices for the fruits of their labor.

The White Boot Brigade hopes to do for the Louisiana commercial fishing industry what organic farming has done for agriculture: to allow consumers to enjoy a better product, with the knowledge that their purchases help encourage environmental sustainability and preserve the livelihoods of smaller-scale growers and producers.

## Our Troops

### Lance Nacio, Anna Marie Seafood

Lance Nacio's family has made its living trapping and fishing since his great-grandfather arrived in South Louisiana from the Philippines a century ago. "I've always been able to be resourceful and make a living off the land," he says. "But over the years, it's become more and more difficult.

"As soon as the White Boot Brigade got started, I jumped on board. And it's been nothing but positive. Everything I've done with the White Boot Brigade has led me in a better direction," he says.

On the White Boot Brigade mission to the Bay Area, Nacio forged an alliance with the restaurant Fish. and garnered a featured spot in Williams-Sonoma's January 2008 catalog, which will be distributed to as many as one million customers. "It's just unbelievable," he says. "It seems like every day we're

picking up new customers from all over. They want to be a part of this. They really like what we're doing, and a lot of it comes through the White Boot Brigade."

In 2007, Nacio installed a quick-freezing system on his boat that allows shrimp to retain its just-caught quality for months; after a day on the water, he stays busy filling orders for overnight shipping to restaurants and customers around the country. "We're putting out some of the best tasting shrimp to ever come out of our waters," he says.

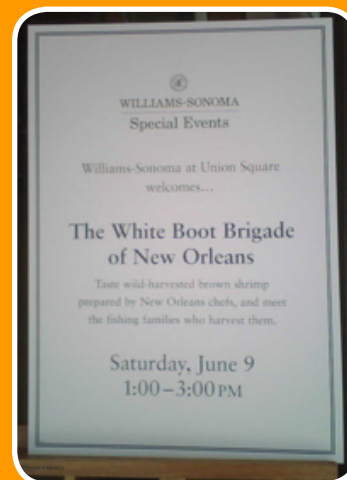
Nacio is working to enlist his fellow shrimpers in the niche marketing cause. "We're hoping to equip other fishermen with the technology I have onboard my boat so we can create a pool of like products," he says. "Then we can really go out and market it.

"We're really trying to give fishermen some sort of independence. The majority of your catch you just have to turn over to the docks, and just take whatever they're

giving at the time." The White Boot Brigade, he says, "is such a positive experience. I just wish other fishers could see a little bit of what the possibilities can be. This is a culture that may fall by the wayside if more things like what the White Boot Brigade is doing don't get done."

[annamarieseafood@charter.net](mailto:annamarieseafood@charter.net)

June 2007 Shrimp tastings at Williams-Sonoma in San Francisco have led to Anna Marie Seafood's feature in the company's prestigious catalogue in January 2008.



It's a philosophy that drives the kitchen of Tabla executive chef and partner Floyd Cardoz, who often features White Boot Brigade shrimp on his restaurant's menu. "A lot of restaurants work within price constraints, but I have a firm belief that if you believe in something, paying a higher price for it eventually pays off," he says. "I never ask suppliers to reduce their prices, because I know if I keep it local and keep it within the country, there won't be overfishing. It will be regulated, we will get the product in season, and the product is taken care of properly.

"I can buy the same size shrimp now as imports that are a lot less expensive," Cardoz says. "But I choose to use Gulf shrimp because the quality is good, the cause is good, and this is a way for us to keep the economy going."

### **We Recruit!**

The White Boot Brigade's campaign has been made possible by the financial and logistical support of a

range of businesses and groups. Our restaurant and food partners include the Food Network, Union Square Hospitality Group in New York City; Fish., Pizzaiolo, and the Google Farmers Market in the San Francisco Bay Area; and Whole Foods Market. Williams-Sonoma provided invaluable exposure for our troops, and the Francis Drake Hotel in San Francisco gave them shelter. Private foundation support includes the Ford Foundation, F.B. Heron Foundation, Gulf Coast Fund for Community Renewal and Ecological Health, W.K. Kellogg

Foundation and Oxfam America, Share Our Strength, and Slow Food USA. And FedEx is helping our shrimpers make sure their product arrives at its destination fresh and intact.

This year, we plan to recruit more shrimpers and partners for the cause. Find out more about the White Boot Brigade, how you can help, and what to do to get the White Boot Brigade to march on your town by visiting [www.marketumbrella.org](http://www.marketumbrella.org) or by calling (504)861-5898. ■



Fish. general manager Kenny Belov presents Slow Food's Poppy Tooker with his take on how a West Coast restaurant prepares Louisiana shrimp.