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## Fish-processing duo not like rest of guys on docks



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By Ed Zieralski  
UNION-TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

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It took a spell for Sarah Saraspe and Melanie Neri to get accepted in the mostly male world of sportfishing, but their Five Star Fish Processing, now in its fifth year of processing fish for anglers, has filleted a niche.

That was a couple of fishing visitors from Arizona yesterday, in a hurry to get home for Fourth of July fireworks, waiting for the albacore they caught on the Pacific Queen's 1½ -day trip. The men faced some long stretches of asphalt and had a bunch of fish that needed to be vacuum-packed and iced for the drive across the desert.

Mike Rawlings and Leroy Allison of Phoenix picked Five Star Fish Processing in Loma Portal, just off Rosecrans and Hancock streets at the gateway to Point Loma. Rawlings was introduced to the service after he returned from an eight-day fishing trip on the Shogun in April. He said Saraspe and Neri and their crew did such a great job with his long-range catch that he knew they'd do the same for the limit of albacore he caught on the 1½-day trip. That, and he needed a quick turnaround.

"I have a vacuum-packer at home, but this just saves a lot of time getting it wrapped up here and iced for the drive," Rawlings said. "The price is more than fair, and they do an outstanding job."



ED ZIERALSKI / Union-Tribune  
Bring in a fresh-caught albacore, and Sarah Saraspe (right) and Melanie Neri will return fillets or smoked fish to take home.

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If you would have told both women a few years back that they'd be dealing with sportfishermen on a daily basis, muscling sport-caught fish and sometimes doing all aspects of the processing business, from filleting to smoking to packaging, they wouldn't have believed it.

But when Sarah's husband, Andy, a second-generation commercial fisherman and avid sportsman, needed an honest set of eyes and a dependable business partner, he turned to his wife. And she chose her best friend to help her.

"Andy wanted me in here because he couldn't be here and fish at the same time," Sarah said. "Plus, I saw different things that I felt I could do to improve the business, things like customer service, so important to this business."

She brought in her friend Neri, and the two of them, well, let's just say they don't look like the typical fish processors one meets dockside.

"Some guys didn't take us seriously at first," Melanie said. "They'd come up, look at us and walk away. But we doubled our business just by being more personable and treating everyone right."

Said Saraspe: "They thought all we did was take the orders for processing at the dock, but if anyone comes back to to the plant, they see that's not the case."

The plant, the old San Diego Ice Company building at 3826 Sherman St., has a view room so anglers, if they choose, may watch their fish go through each step of processing. There's a waiting room with cable TV, magazines, the works.

There is no fish for sale at Five Star, just sport-caught fish guaranteed to be the fish the angler caught on the boat.

"That's one of the big concerns fishermen have," Saraspe said. "At Five Star, they're not getting previously frozen fish. They're getting their fish."

Saraspe said they can do same-day service or a delayed pickup on any catch.

She said the typical yield, the amount of fillets an angler can expect, varies by the size of the fish. A fish over 100 pounds yields about 50 percent of its weight in fillets. Smaller fish range from 30 percent to 40 percent.

They'll also ship fish for fishermen who are from out of town.

But in cases like the guys from Phoenix, they just load their vacuum-packed fillets in their cooler and drive out.

For information, call (619) 299-9996 or email at [fivestarfishprocessingservices@yahoo.com](mailto:fivestarfishprocessingservices@yahoo.com).

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