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### Filmmaker captures spirit of commercial fishermen

BY SUSAN WEST | SENTINEL STAFF

When Matt Barr started filming Sneads Ferry fishermen in 1999, his camera captured "tough, but survivable" times.

The filmmaker was struck by the strong sense of community in the small fishing village on the New River in Onslow County.

"The people of Sneads Ferry have a deeply imbedded sense of community," says Barr. "They really do look out for one another, even though they have little money."

Barr didn't anticipate that by the time he stopped filming in 2005, his camera would have captured the fishermen snared in a cataclysmic web of social and economic change.

The web was spun, in part, by the new global economy and by a coastal development boom.

Barr saw imports take hold of ninety percent of the shrimp consumed in this country, driving down prices paid to American fishermen.

And, he saw land values shoot up an average of 235 percent in Sneads Ferry, fueled by America's insatiable desire for a house with a waterfront view.

"Now in 2006, with most of the fish houses up for sale, the fishermen's very survival is in jeopardy," says Barr.

Barr's documentary is called "Wild Caught: The Life and Struggles of an American Fishing Town."

The film's title comes from the distinction made between fish and shellfish caught in the wild by commercial fishermen, the last of the hunter-gatherers, and farm-raised seafood.



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[RSS](#) Top Stories  
[RSS](#) Politics  
[RSS](#) Business  
[RSS](#) Letters/Editorials  
[RSS](#) Sports  
[RSS](#) Obituaries  
[RSS](#) Features  
[RSS](#) Entertainment  
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Calendar  
National News  
Financial News  
Health News  
Archives  
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Barr calls the fishermen in the film “some of the last true independent spirits left in America,” and says that their struggle to survive is representative of what is happening to fishing towns across the country.

“But, this film is about more than fishing,” says Barr. “It is about family, community, spirituality, life itself.

“These people have a connection to the natural world that most of us don't have.”



Barr is an associate professor in the Department of Broadcasting and Cinema at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. He made his first film at age thirteen. He has worked as a freelance screenwriter, a worker on an organic farm, and a cross-country truck driver. He also worked with a traveling carnival show for five seasons.

During the production of “Wild Caught”, Barr created the Unheard Voices Project, a program promoting the collection of interviews with workers in traditional occupations threatened by globalization.

“Wild Caught” was funded by grants from North Carolina Sea Grant, the North Carolina Arts Council, and the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

In November, Barr will travel to New Orleans where “Wild Caught” will be shown at the Work Boat Expo, organized by National Fisherman magazine.

“Wild Caught” will be shown at 7 p.m. on Monday, Sept. 25, at Roanoke Island Festival Park. Barr will be on hand to answer questions about the film. The screening is sponsored by the Albemarle Ecological Field Site of the Carolina Environmental Program of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

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