



Only four diners braved the smell of decaying anchovies at Aldo's restaurant this morning.

Dan Coyro/Sentinel

'Nosebusters' comes to town

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By JOAN RAYMOND
Sentinel Staff Writer

SANTA CRUZ — "Nosebusters" — an epic fish story featuring a cast of millions — is still top bill at the Small Craft Harbor and promises to stay in town for several more weeks.

Stars of the show are hundreds of tons of anchovies that made a dramatic entrance into the harbor Friday and Saturday, but did not leave and died by the millions.

The smell of rotting fish clings to the uniforms of clean-up crews with the tenacity of an abalone.

It invades the personal air space of joggers as they cross the harbor bridge with their nostrils either flared or covered.

It blankets the harborside restaurants, exterminating appetites on contact.

Business has been off at Aldo's and the Crow's Nest restaurants, workers there reported.

On a sparkling day like today, the breakfast trade at Aldo's would normally be quite brisk.

But only a few customers had the stomach for a harborside breakfast.

Aldo's Manger Jose Gonzalez, 29, said business has been off since Monday, the day the smell became intense.

"There should be a waiting line of customers out there," said Gonzalez, scanning a sunny patio filled with empty tables.

He said there were only 40 patrons in Wednesday's lunch crowd, compared to the usual 300. And some of those patrons were members of the California Conservation Corps working on the clean-up.

Albacore fisherman Frank Ribeiro looked up from his French toast at the Aldo's counter and claimed the smell didn't bother him at all.

"You get used to it once you're in here for a couple hours," commented Ribeiro.

Don Berry, preparations cook at the Crow's Nest restaurant, said he wasn't bothered one bit by the odor.

"I smell a lot worse when I haven't taken a shower," said Berry. "Personally, I can endure it and handle the smell. Frankly it amuses me.

"What can you say? What can you do? "Anchovies aren't on the menu here."

Harbormaster Steve Scheiblaue said there are more dead anchovies than was originally thought.

He estimated 400 tons have died, about the same amount that died in 1980 when a huge school of anchovies decayed in the harbor.

He said crews have cleaned out 90 percent of the dead fish that floated to the surface. The rest are decaying on the harbor floor.

The lack of oxygen in the water has meant death to 75 species of fish in the harbor, including striped bass, said Scheiblaue.

Scheiblaue estimated clean-up costs at \$40,000 to \$50,000.

Today, crews continued to aerate the water and to pump in water from the bay.

Despite the aeration, Scheiblaue said, the oxygen level in the harbor water is zero.

Drawing on past experience, Scheiblaue estimated the "intense" smell will last as long as 10 days and odors will linger for about six weeks.