

THE TUNA GOURMET

BY PEG HERRING

Fresh Oregon albacore tuna encrusted in sesame seeds and grilled with an apricot glaze. Sounds mouthwatering, doesn't it? It's the creation of Eric Jenkins, Executive Chef at the Seafood Cooking School in Astoria.

Jenkins creates recipes like this from fresh Oregon seafood at the Duncan Law Seafood Consumer Center. The consumer center, the Seafood Cooking School and Oregon State University's Seafood Laboratory all share the same building complex across the street from the Columbia River docks in Astoria. And they share a place in the dream-come-true of Duncan Law.

Law, an Oregon State University emeritus professor of food science, envisioned a place to research and develop new products to benefit consumers and the Northwest fishing industry. The non-profit center opened in 1998, connecting OSU research with consumers, fish harvesters, processors and cooks.

Several times a month, in the center's demonstration kitchen and conference room, Jenkins shares the secrets of preparing the Northwest's best seafood in cook-

ing classes and demonstrations. Jenkins' classes have been popular from the beginning, but after *Sunset* magazine recommended the Seafood Cooking School in its "Tips & Trips" column, many of the classes have sold out quickly.

At a recent class, the topic was Oregon's albacore tuna.

"Albacore has a mild, rich taste and a firm steaky texture," Jenkins explained to the class. "It's very high in omega-3 oils, right behind sardines and mackerel. And the albacore caught off the Oregon coast is lower in mercury than most other tunas."

Soon, the state-of-the-art kitchen had come alive with preparations, as Jenkins and sous chef Jennifer Chapman assigned tasks to all the students. Brian, a music teacher from Astoria, chopped cilantro for the glaze. Sharon, who makes the trip from Portland to Astoria several times a year for seafood classes, stirred toasted sprigs of thyme into the fish stock. Brenda, another Portland regular, simmered the apricot glaze.

As the group chopped and stirred, Jenkins explained that the teamwork behind the evening's meal is part of every aspect of work at the Consumer Seafood Center. Jenkins works closely with a team of scientists at the Seafood Lab in the development of new value-added products through a process called "culinology."

"Culinology brings together food scientists, chemists, chefs, product developers, packaging technologists and marketers who work together on a product from start to finish," Jenkins said. The center's culinology team has been



Executive chef Eric Jenkins puts the finishing touches on his grilled albacore tuna at the Seafood Cooking School. Photo, Lynn Ketchum.

working on a whole suite of potential products featuring Oregon albacore. They include ready-to-eat tuna salad and tuna loins vacuum-packed in marinade, ready to grill.

Another possibility is smoked tuna bellies (the part of the fish with the highest omega-3 oil content), packed in olive oil. "It's soft and rich, like a pâté," Jenkins explained. "You can eat it with crackers or flaked into pasta."

Jenkins then turned his attention to the tuna at hand. After quickly searing the sesame-coated loins (that's the key to a perfect crust), he sliced and grilled individual steaks, glazing them with the caramelized apricot mixture. Then chefs and students sat down at a linen-clothed table to savor the dinner they had prepared together.

"We do this to spread the word about Oregon's seafood," said Jenkins, sipping a glass of chardonnay at the end of a successful class.

For more information, check out the Center's web site: <http://www.seafoodschooll.org/>.



Cooking student Sharon Couey savors the aroma of her work at the Seafood Cooking School at the Duncan Law Seafood Consumer Center in Astoria, Oregon. Photo, Lynn Ketchum