



**Food**

17 LIFELINE

**MAKING A GREAT  
CATCH** Racks of  
chub hang at Acme's  
Greenpoint factory.

# Fin-tastic voyage

Every day, Brooklyn's Acme Smoked Fish goes global

BY ISABEL FORGANG

DAILY NEWS

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APR ANTICELLI

# Lox, stock and barrel

At Acme Smoked Fish, super Nova is a shining star **BY ISABEL FORGANG**

**I**t's just about 4 p.m. and 84-year-old Rubin Caslow, who's driven from his home in Roslyn, L.I., to the Acme Smoked Fish factory in Greenpoint, Brooklyn, is just about to start his work day. Or more accurately, his work night.

Caslow, whose father-in-law, Harry Brownstein, started Acme more than 50 years ago, will spend the next 12 to 14 hours processing orders. He'll make sure that the right number of cartons of Atlantic smoked salmon, lox, gravlax and pastrami-flavored smoked salmon, as well as the sable, brook trout fillets, kippered salmon, peppered mackerel and chunky whitefish spread end up on the right trucks.

The fish products, bearing the Acme and Blue Hill Bay labels, will be headed to stores throughout the metropolitan area, New England and as far south as Philadelphia, while other orders are shipped to markets farther afield.

"The trucks start heading out between 3 and 5 a.m., and Dad won't leave until the last truck is gone," says Robert Caslow, Rubin's son.

The business is very much a family affair. While Rubin rules the night shift, his sons Robert and Eric work the day side. "Eric buys the raw product and oversees processing, while my responsibility is marketing and distribution, getting the product out," says Robert.

Robert's first cousins Marc and Gary Brownstein are also part of the third-generation family team, and now in its fourth generation — Robert's daughter Emily and Eric's son David — have gotten involved as well.

It's a business that calls for long hours and constant attention to detail — quality of the fish, equipment upkeep, filling orders. But family members say it also has yielded great satisfaction in watching the company grow to its current position as the largest smoked-fish producer in New York State (and one of the three largest in the country).

## GLOBAL BOUNTY

That package of Acme or Blue Hill Bay smoked salmon you'll find in your local supermarket starts when tractor-trailers loaded with fresh and frozen salmon, tuna, whitefish and other varieties arrive at the Greenpoint smokehouse. During the holiday season, a quarter million pounds of salmon alone arrive here each week. Acme buys fish direct from fishermen and fish farms along the east coast of Canada, as well as Alaska, Norway, Scotland and Chile.

The whole fish are gutted and filleted, then placed in stainless-steel tanks — each of which holds 600 pounds of fish — for curing in a mixture of salt, sugar and water. The fish will remain in the brine for



RON ANTON

**NET PROFITS** Rubin Caslow, below, runs Acme at night; above, whitefish in brine.



CHRISTIE JOHNSTON

means it's dried rather than cooked in an oven that gets no hotter than 70 to 75 de-

supermarkets. It's here, too, that 5-pound containers of plain ground smoked salmon (no mayo) are packed, destined for delis and supermarkets that offer their own "homemade" lox and cream cheese. "Yes, lox and cream cheese is made with Nova, not [salty-flavored] lox," Emily says. It's just one of many nomenclature inconsistencies that exist in this industry.

Most of the smoked fish winds up in the slicing room, where the sides of salmon are trimmed and fed through one of four slicing machines, cut on an angle, weighed and sealed in packages. Gary Brownstein, production manager of the sliced salmon department, says, "We try to get a 1/2-ounce slice for the regular smoked fish, but with fish that is dry-cured, we cut it thinner, because it tastes better that way."

The machines, manned by employees who wear smocks, plastic hats and rubber gloves, cut two 2 1/2-pound salmon fillets at a time into about 60 slices each. "The machines turn out 160 slices a minute and they are going 10 hours a day," says Brownstein.

## A fresh take on retail

**A**lthough you can go to your local supermarket or deli to pick up some smoked fish, you can also go directly to Acme once a week and get it there. "Fish Fridays" find not only local residents, but people traveling from Manhattan and Long Island, to the smokehouse at 30 Gem St.

Every Friday, from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m., packages of smoked salmon, chubs, trout, tuna, sable and whitefish, as well as salmon spread, chunky whitefish salad and herring and cream sauce, are sold at cost, cash only. "The fish is only 4 hours out of the oven. You can't get it any fresher," Emily