

## Unexpected Dividends in New York Harbor

To a lot of people, those waters are synonymous with concrete footwear.

What they don't know is that the harbor is alive with game fish | by ROBERT H. BOYLE

THERE'S A LOT OF FISHY BUSINESS going on around the United Nations world headquarters in Manhattan, but it has nothing to do with international crises. Close by the UN in the East River is an uninviting pile of rocks that is called, as the large sign proclaims, U Thant Island, after the late secretary-general from Burma. What's fishy about that? Well, U Thant Island also happens to be one of the hot spots for striped bass and bluefish in the waters surrounding New York City.

Fishing hot spot? New York City? If you believe what you read in the tabloids, all you can find in those waters are orange rinds, cars that have been sunk in insurance-fraud schemes and victims of mob hits. Now you can add to that list inshore game fish. And not just strays. The fishing is so hot in the shadow of the Statue of Liberty and the Brooklyn Bridge that Joseph Shastay Jr. has become the first licensed charter-boat captain in my memory to take anglers out in New York Harbor on a regular basis.

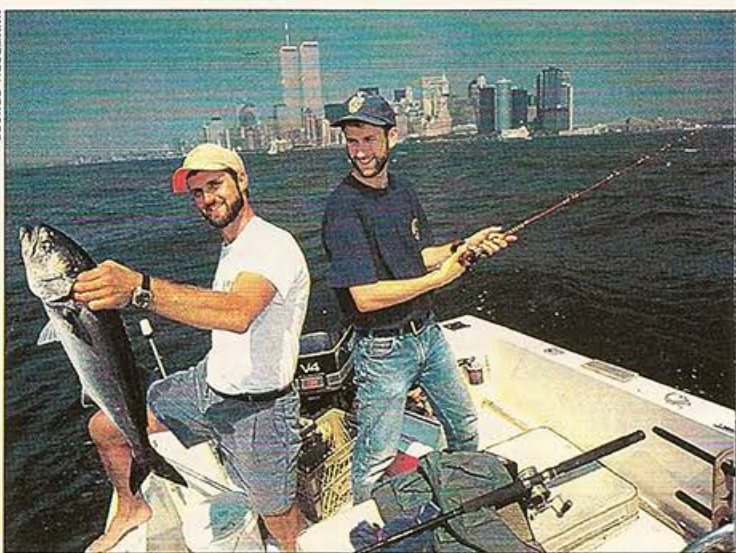
Trim and sporting an appropriately nautical beard, Shastay specializes in striped bass and bluefish. Stripers are present in the area all year round, while blues, up to 16 pounds, abound from May to November. "In the spring, there are more fish in the harbor than out in the Atlantic," Shastay says. "I know because I used to go out to the ocean. The only spot where you really don't catch fish in the harbor is in the deep channels, but sometimes you can even catch them there."

Shastay's boat is a 19-foot center-

sole Mako Classic, owned by the captain and two partners. "You don't need a high-seas boat for the harbor," he says. "There's never been a day when it couldn't go out or come in." The 19-footer also allows Shastay to maneuver tight into submerged pilings and rocks and the currents swirling around them, where big fish hang out, waiting for a meal of bait-fish to come tumbling by.

Some of the techniques he learned angling for largemouths—such as jiggling in drowned timber—have proved effective in the harbor. But unlike the close-mouthed competitors on the fish-for-cash bass tournament circuit, Shastay finds that most harbor anglers—of whom there are maybe 40 regulars—readily talk about what's hitting and where. "They tell all," he says. "They want others to share in it."

After high school, Shastay worked as a trucker and then went to Jersey City State College at night, majoring in biology. In his spare hours, he continued to explore and fish the harbor. "As long as I've known him, and that's 15 years, he has wanted to be a harbor charter captain," says his wife, Joanne. It took Shastay eight years to get his B.S. degree. After receiving it, in 1989, he went to work on a research trawler for Normandeau Associates, a Massachusetts-based environmental firm that has a contract with the New



Out beyond the downtown skyline, Sautner admires the bluefish Shastay has landed.

Because of the boat's size, Shastay limits the number of anglers to three at most (two if Steve Sautner, one of his partners, goes along as mate). He charges \$225 for a six- to seven-hour charter—whether for one, two or three anglers—or \$300 for eight to nine hours. He berths the Mako near his home in Jersey City, just across the Hudson River from Manhattan.

Shastay, 33, began fishing New York Harbor at six, when he caught eels off the Jersey City piers with his father. Later, he bought a rubber raft and ducked the towering passenger liners and freighters as he fished for stripers and blues. He also competed in freshwater bass tournaments.

York State Power Authority to trawl, tag and release striped bass and tomcod in the Hudson River and New York Harbor.

Aside from putting fliers in a couple of tackle shops, Shastay has done no advertising, but word of mouth on his charter service spread quickly after he took his first client on a four-hour trip last March. Shastay had his charter use plugs, which are generally considered useless in winter because the cold-blooded fish are lethargic. The astonished angler landed an 11-pound striper and immediately booked another trip.

Shastay, who averages four charters a week, still works for Normandeau. "One