

Off the cuff with 'On The Hook': On the water and in the kitchen with Framingham North grads on NESN fishing show

By E.T. Robbins / News Correspondent
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When a man asks himself what he should do with his life, the response is often interesting.

The answer for Framingham native Dave Sloan involves three things: television, fishing and seafood. Recently, these three elements came to life.

Sloan's new saltwater fishing show "On The Hook" debuted in January on NESN and currently airs at 5 on Friday afternoons. One of the regular features is a culinary segment called "Hook and Cook." Sloan and local chefs work their magic on everything from tuna to shark.

Sloan, who now lives in Boxboro, said he wants the show to reach beyond the stereotypical fisherman.

"I wanted it to be something different than the typical shows you see out there right now, which are all just fishing, fishing, fishing. I wanted to try to cast a little bit wider net — no pun intended — to get a larger demographic of people, not just the guys who sit and watch the fishing shows, but also try to get women involved, and guys who cook, and women who cook....Kids are a big thing, too," Sloan said.

A recent episode featured children sharking. The kids pulled in sharks three to four times their own weight (with the help of Sloan and crew). A marine biologist tagged the sharks and released them back into the ocean. The tags monitor the sharks' movement.

Of course, the leap from fishing enthusiast to fishing host (and creator, producer, promoter and salesman) has not been without its challenges. But Sloan has had help, most notably from longtime friend, fellow Framingham North grad and current producer, John Fitzgerald.

They met in the sixth grade when Sloan's family moved from Belmont to Framingham. The two men, now both 35, remained close friends even though distance often separated them.

Sloan and Fitzgerald both went to the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, but Sloan dropped out and joined his father's painting business. Fitzgerald finished UMass with a degree in forestry, but ended up working summers on the Vineyard as a bartender. He spent his winters following the cash flow — once to Aspen and then to warmer destinations including Hawaii and Saint John in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Fitzgerald said, "But I always went back to the Vineyard, and every summer...our crew of core guys would come out and go fishing."

Fitzgerald said it was a good life for a while, but then things changed.

"All of a sudden, I turned 30 and everyone was married and everyone had kids, and all of sudden what I was doing wasn't cool any more," Fitzgerald said.

Three years ago, he moved back to Framingham to be closer to family and friends and to ask the pivotal question, "What should I do with my life?"

Meanwhile, two important things happened to Sloan. He entered the white collar world of sales, and he fell in love. Sloan married Cari in 1995 and a couple of children followed a few years later. Although life was

good and Sloan was successful, he did not feel passionate about his work. He also missed being outdoors.

A layoff in 2002 proved to be beneficial. Sloan decided to figure out what he really wanted to do with his life. For Sloan, this process involved considering all the characteristics of his dream job. One thing was certain — he needed to be outside.

Sloan's brother, John, had been doing some work on "Charlie Moore Outdoors," a popular show on NESN. John mentioned that there had been some talk about adding a saltwater fishing show to complement the lineup.

The idea clicked. Sloan loved fishing. Sloan and Fitzgerald held yearly fishing reunions on the Vineyard. Sloan could be outside. He could be his own boss.

After doing some research and work on a proposal, Sloan called Fitz and asked if he wanted to be involved. Fitzgerald happily agreed.

Sloan said, "First of all, we're good friends. Second of all, we've done a lot of things together....John and I work very well together fleshing out ideas."

But other people helped, too. Sloan said that his wife's emotional and economic support has been unwavering. He said Charlie, of "Charlie Moore Outdoors," guided him with the proposal.

Sloan's final proposal was about 12 pages long. NESN liked the concept and asked to see a pilot. This brought new challenges.

The first production company Sloan hired did not share the two anglers' vision. Sloan and Fitzgerald did not realize this until after the pilot was shot and money had been invested. But Sloan is philosophical about these gaffes.

He said, "The first time is a learning experience. The second time you do it, that's a mistake. I'll have a learning experience, but I'll try not to make mistakes."

Finally, the pilot was ready. NESN liked it. Sloan signed a "time-buy" contract with NESN during the fourth quarter of 2003 for a January to December 2004 run. Sloan bought the half-hour time slot from NESN and agreed to supply a minimum of 22 minutes of footage. Of the remaining eight minutes, NESN got one minute to sell and Sloan sold the remaining seven minutes to advertisers.

Sloan and Fitzgerald spent last year producing the 13 shows that will run four times each this year. Currently, they're preparing scripts and locations for shows that will air in 2005 — if "On The Hook" is renewed.

The two reserve their excitement over what many people might characterize as success. Sloan said hosting and producing the show are only parts of the big picture and that selling advertising takes up much of his time.

"I don't want to just have a show on TV. I want to make a career out of it. I want to make money out of it. I want to support my family out of it," Sloan said.

Looking ahead, Sloan said there is still much work to be done, but he remains optimistic. After all, he's found his passion, he's his own boss and he gets to be outdoors.

"I'll never in my life work for anyone else again. Never. Even if this show doesn't work out, I'll do something else." Sloan is thoughtful for a moment before smiling and adding, "There's no question in my mind this is going to be a success."

The warm weather is bringing out the fisherman in a lot of Massachusetts residents who are itching to get out on the water. Wet your tastebuds with this recipe from Dave Sloan, host of NESN's "On The Hook."

SIZZLIN' SEARED TUNA

INGREDIENTS:

- 4 tuna steaks (approximately 8 ounces each), cut into elongated blocks
- 4 tablespoons of dried bonito flakes (this can be bought in any Oriental food shop)
- 4 tablespoons of regular or toasted sesame seeds
- 2 tablespoons of vegetable oil (or enough to cover bottom of skillet)
- 1 tablespoon kosher salt
- 1/2 teaspoon black pepper
- 1/3 cup soy sauce
- 1/3 teriyaki sauce
- Wasabi, to taste
- 1/2 teaspoon Chef Chow's Hot & Spicy Oil or other spicy oil
- 1 large cucumber
- 1 large tomato
- 1/2 cup feta cheese

DIRECTIONS:

- To prepare the "dry rub," combine dried bonito flakes, sesame seeds, kosher salt and pepper in a bowl and mix thoroughly. Pour mixture onto a flat plate and spread it around the plate.
- To prepare the cucumber and tomato salad, cut cucumber and tomatoes and add to bowl. Add in feta cheese and desired dressing. Set aside in refrigerator and chill. (Balsamic vinaigrette is great!)
- Wash and pat dry tuna. It's OK to have the tuna little damp (a small amount of vegetable oil may need to be rubbed onto tuna for the dry rub to stay on).
- Take tuna blocks and roll tuna through the dry rub so that the tuna is completely covered on all sides. Repeat process for all the tuna and set aside.
- Combine soy sauce, teriyaki sauce and wasabi in a bowl and mix. There are variations as to what you can do to this mixture. In a small skillet you can heat this mixture on a medium flame and reduce it to a thick paste, which can be chilled and used a dipping sauce for the seared tuna. Or, after mixing it all together and before the tuna is rolled into the dry rub, you can marinate tuna in this mixture for approximately 5-10 minutes. Tuna takes on the flavor quickly so marinate to your own taste.
- Add vegetable oil and Hot and Spicy oil into skillet and heat on medium flame until oil is hot. Add in the tuna and cook each side of the tuna for approximately 1 minute. Use tongs to flip or turn tuna onto each side. The rub on the tuna should become a golden brown and somewhat crispy as you cook each side of the tuna.
- Slice tuna into slices and plate with cucumber and tomato salad (and basic white rice or Oriental

sticky rice).

- Eat this on Fridays at 5 p.m. (check the schedule at www.nesn.com; sometimes the show is preempted by the Red Sox) while watching the show and then log onto www.onthehook.com and tell me how much you loved it. Enjoy!