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Tuesday, March 28, 2006

# COMMUNITY

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CLOSE-UP | MOSS LANDING

## Short keeps scientists afloat

*Skipper of research vessel  
Point Sur revels in his  
most enjoyable posting*

By SILAS SPAETH  
For The Salinas Californian



PROVIDED PHOTO

**MOSS LANDING** — Ron Short estimates he has worked on 20 different vessels during his career at sea, but his current assignment as captain of the research vessel Point Sur is by far his most enjoyable posting.

Owned by the National Science Foundation, the Point Sur is operated for the Central California Oceanographic Cooperative by the Moss Landing Marine Laboratories.

The biggest challenge working as the captain of a research vessel instead of a cruise ship or cargo vessel, Short said, is the need to maneuver the boat to handle the various equipment that goes into the ocean.

"Making sure we are in the right position, going the correct speed or staying in one place while equipment is being deployed takes a certain amount of skill," he said.

Ron Short, skipper of the Point Sur, has a nice view of Moss Landing Harbor from his seagoing 'office.'

One of the newer pieces of high-tech equipment that the Point Sur has been testing is an underwater vehicle called TRIAXUS.

Towed behind the ship at about 6 knots, the device collects information on water temperature, density, and continuity. In the past the process of taking readings was much slower.

"Now we can map the Santa Barbara Channel in 36 hours as opposed to three to four days," Short said. "We probably have (more) experience using this new technology than any other research boat."

Commissioned in 1981, the 135-foot Point Sur is especially suited for short to medium-length cruises and operates in waters off California, Oregon, and Wash-

### ABOUT THE POINT SUR

Commissioned in 1981, the 135-foot Point Sur is the largest of three research vessels operated by the Moss Landing Marine Laboratories.

ington. It's the largest of three boats operated by the Moss Landing Marine Laboratories. The other two deep-water vessels are the John Martin and the Shelia B.

The Point Sur is specially equipped with the necessary navigational, laboratory and mechanical facilities that support biological, geological, chemical and physical oceanographic research.

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# CAPTAIN/ Vessel can carry about two dozen people

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The ship's capabilities include being able to set and recover meters that measure ocean currents, undertake chemical sampling, and engage in diving and biological trawling, as well as gear-testing and seismic reflection profiling, a process that involves measuring the two-way travel time of seismic waves transmitted from the surface of the water and reflected back to it.

## Cruise ship to research vessel

Short began his career working on dive boats in Santa Barbara. "I came up through the hous pipe (the pipe the chain goes through when the anchor is released)," he said, laughing. "I started as a deckhand and worked my way up."

In the late 1970s Short received his 50-ton operator's certificate, which allowed him to operate tour and fishing boats. He then moved to Alaska where he captained a number of boats, including one hauling explosives for DuPont. Additional tonnage certifications allowed Short to move up to larger ships such as coastal freighters and small cruise ships.

After six years serving as the captain of small cruise ships in Mexican and Alaskan waters, Short became the captain of the Point Sur. He worked in that capacity from 2002-2003 and then rejoined the ship in April of 2005.

Powered by two 379 Caterpillar engines, the twin-screw vessel can cruise at about 10 knots. The research cruises the Point Sur engages in range from day trips off the Central

Coast to three- to four-week trips anywhere on the West Coast.

When at sea, Short, his chief mate and second mate, rotate four hours on and eight hours off on the bridge — the area of the ship where the navigational controls are. On research cruises, Short said, a marine tech acts as the liaison between the scientific staff and the ship's crew.

"The marine tech can relate to the scientific party better than I can and vice versa," Short said. This may seem like an unnecessary layer of communication but it's a safety issue more than anything else. While the scientists aboard the ship are always changing, the three marine techs are permanently assigned to the Point Sur.

With a crew of eight, the research ship can accommodate about 24 people on a day cruise and about 20 crew and research staff for an extended period of time.

## Tricky harbor

Responding to the question of how easy is it to maneuver into and out of the Moss Landing Harbor, Short laughed. "You have to pay attention," he said. "We're paid to not make mistakes. It's a tight harbor so we want to be right the first time."

The channel is deep enough that the Point Sur does not have to wait for a high tide to maneuver in or out. Even at the shallowest point of the channel, there are still 6 to 7 feet of clearance for the ship.

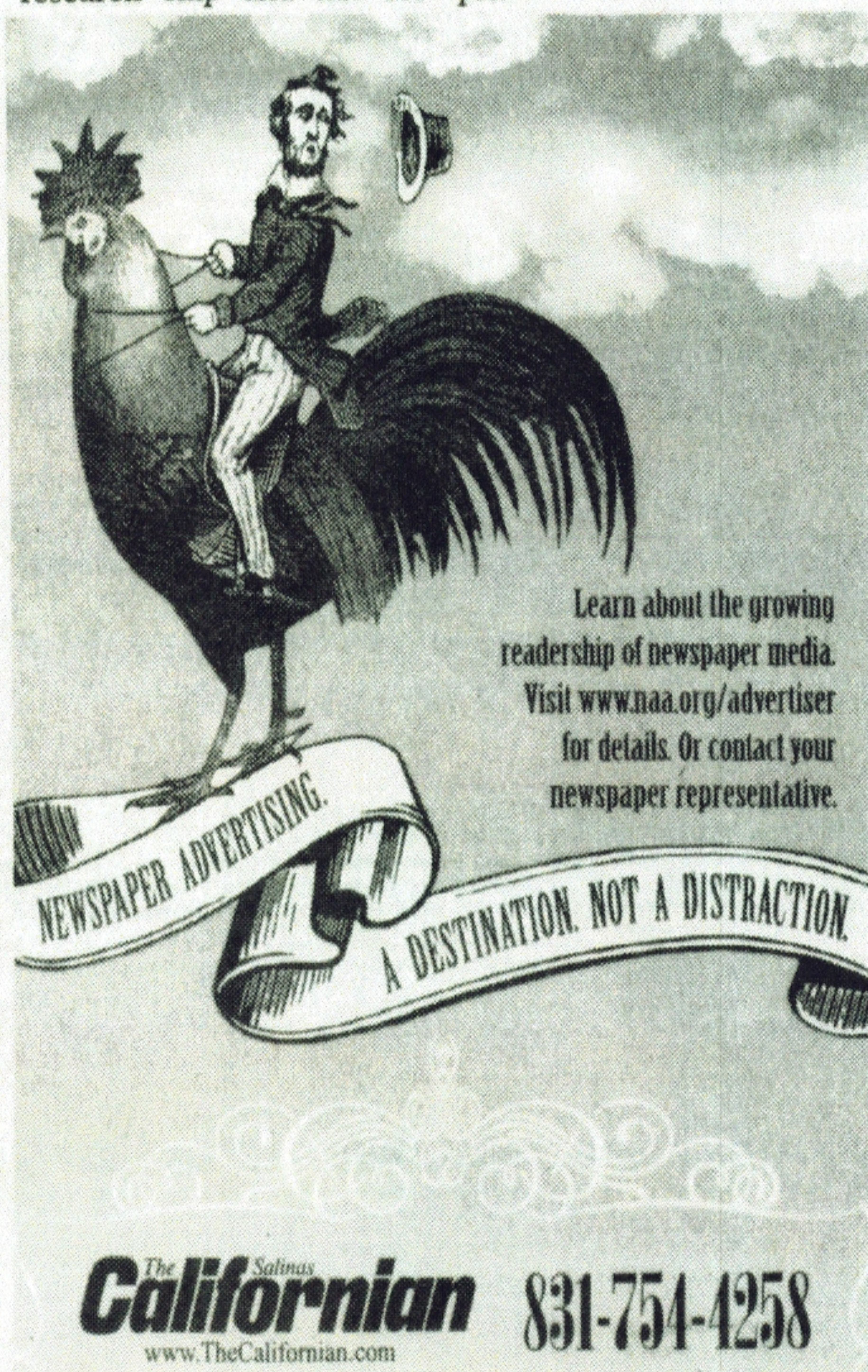
The institutions that use the Point Sur for marine research include San Francisco State University; Moss Landing

Marine Laboratories; the Naval Post Graduate School in Monterey; University of California, Santa Cruz; California State University, Monterey Bay; U.C. Santa Barbara, and Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute in Massachusetts. A very busy schedule means that the ship is at sea from 160 to 190 days per year.

Short stressed that the Point Sur is an "uninspected vessel," which means it's purely a research ship and not for

charter by the general public. "We only deal with marine research institutions," he said. "We can't conduct day trips to whale watch or do anything of that nature."

Looking out over the Moss Landing harbor from the bridge of the Point Sur, Short, who's 52, said, "This is definitely a place to work until I retire. I'm fortunate to be working with a good organization and a good group of people."



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