



Jim Webb, CEO of US Abalone

The MAN

and the MUSSEL

Okay, so it's not a mussel, but the abalone is an economic and gustatory powerhouse with a future in the Gem Industry.

Jim Webb clues us in.

The Pacific splashes cold and slate gray against the dark, jagged rocks jutting from the shores of Davenport, California. Its waters are the natural home of sea otters, crabs, sea stars and California red abalone. The coast of Davenport is also home to US Abalone, a company responsible for growing and distributing millions of the mollusks each year.

At US Abalone's four acre complex, the abalone are raised from day one to market size in a very natural environment. The water quality is pristine here, which, according to Webb, is beneficial to growing abalone and producing pearls.

And he should know: Webb is "intrigued with aquaculture" and has been since his childhood in Connecticut. He admits that his interest in abalone is primarily economic, but his passion for pearls is a bit more romantic: it was catalyzed in college where he minored in geology and it was further galvanized by his wife, Amy, who is something of a gemophile herself. "My wife has been a great influence," Webb says.

US Abalone has begun nucleating the mollusks to produce the highest quality pearls, according to Webb. The nucleation process begins with abalone that have reached market size (3 to 3 1/2 inches). US Abalone has not begun to market the pearls, "We're examining what the best channels of distribution are for us," Webb says; nor will they disclose how many abalone have been nucleated (Webb leaves the number at a comfortable "thousands"), but they are confident that the pearls will easily find and fill a niche in the Gem Industry.

"[Abalone] offer a high quality gem unique from any other," Webb says.

See Abalone, other side



Neal Thomas Beaty

Harry Cannon

Trina McCandless

Marjorie Moormeier

Russel O'Neill

Jan Winick-Heerman

Thank you very much for the overwhelming number of membership renewals. Your support of the organization is commendable and we look forward to bringing you another year of fellowship and educational opportunities!

Accredited Gemologists
Association Newsletter
Newswire©1998

Publisher

Thom Underwood, GG,
ASA, ISA, NAJA

Editor

Douglas Kearney

3309 Juanita Street
San Diego, CA 92105
Phone 619.286.1603
Fax 619.286.7541

Email thomu@earthlink.net

Also in this edition:

The AGA Turns 25!



The AGA Turns 25!

If you were looking for an excuse to go to Tucson next year, we've got one for you: 1999 marks the AGA's 25th Anniversary and we plan to celebrate with style.

When Antonio Bonanno formed the AGA in 1974, he intended it to be an organization where gemologists could network, sharing learning techniques and information. He also wanted it to be a watchdog for gemological ethics, holding members to a firm code of professional conduct.

Today, that tradition still stands.

As an organization filled with an international roster of well-reputed gemologists (and gemmologists), the AGA stands as a worldwide recognized authority within the Gem Industry. The International Headquarters often gets phone calls from journalists seeking sources and customers seeking gemologists in their neighborhood. This reputation exists because of the caliber of our membership throughout the past 25 years, and we plan to take Mr. Bonanno's vision into the 21st Century. 

America has George Washington, and we have Antonio Bonanno. Mr. Bonanno was the AGA's founding father.



AGA members (l to r) Nancy Stacey, Kirk Root and Larry Phillips become one with the abalone at Jim Webb's presentation in Las Vegas.

Abalone Continued from other side

However, on June 6, the gemologists were not initially admiring the abalone's pearls. They were enjoying its taste. The place: the AGA Soirée at JCK, tucked away in a home overlooking the Desert Inn Golf Course. Las Vegas, Nevada is a tad dryer than Davenport, and the only abalone stirring there were on a stove. Mr. and Mrs. Webb were preparing abalone cakes alongside the AGA's resident chef, Mary Huntington, for members of the AGA.

Many ancient cultures believe that one must consume an animal to truly understand it; if this is the case, then by the time the gemologists sat down to watch Webb's video and hear his presentation, they were well acquainted with the buttery mollusk.

Webb discussed the anatomy and ecology of the abalone. For instance, unlike mussels (clams and oysters), abalone are not filter feeders. Abalone actively seek out sea weed to graze upon. Their shells are more than just rainbow

sheened ornaments; they provide formidable armor, and when combined with the mollusk's ability to clamp down doggedly to aquatic rocks, they are good protection against predators.

Although humankind, with its unpleasant tendency to overfish, is the abalone's greatest enemy, sea otters are fairly aggressive predators as well.

Still, gemologists will be gemologists, and what ultimately had their mouths watering was not the abalone cakes, but the opportunity to get an exclusive look at the pearls, making the AGA the first gemological organization in the world to see US Abalone pearls. Webb wasn't just showing off; he asked for members' expert opinions on pearl luster, color and price ranges.

With Jim Webb at the helm, US Abalone has the man and the muscle to move the mollusk from the dinner plate to the jewelry store window. 