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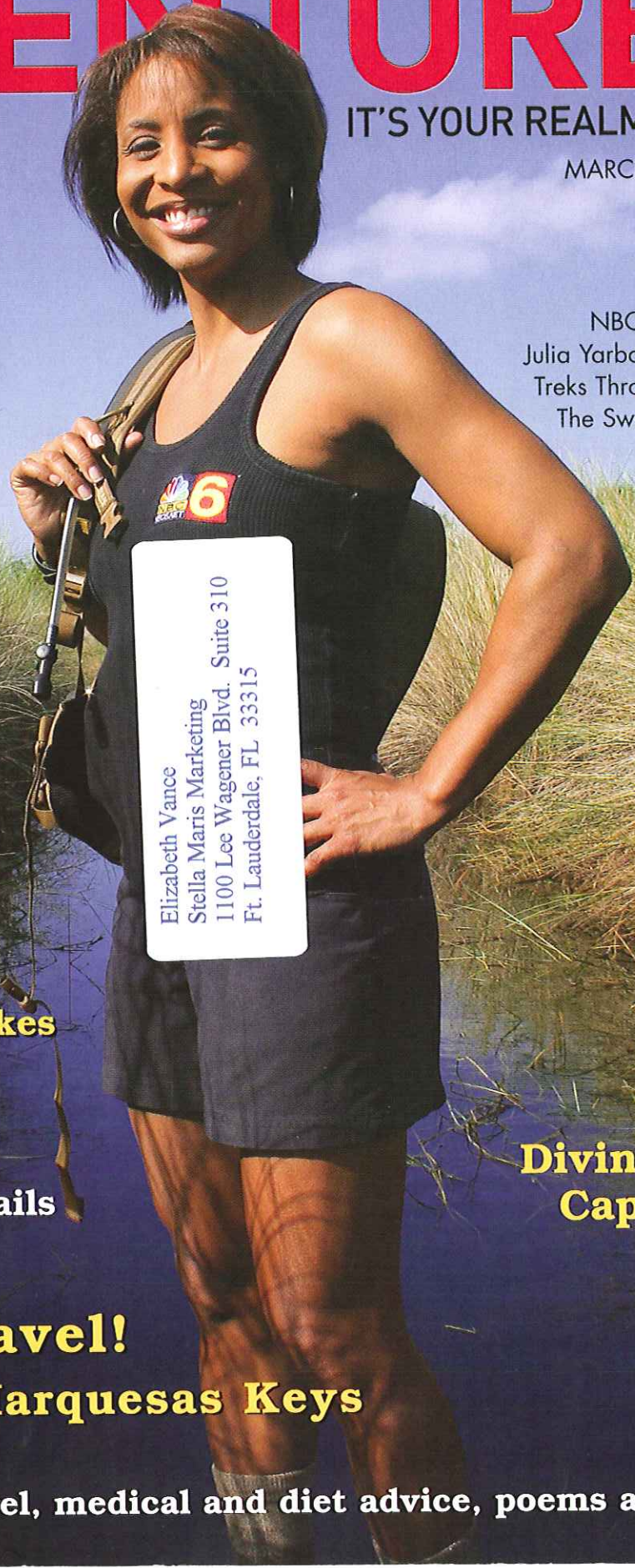
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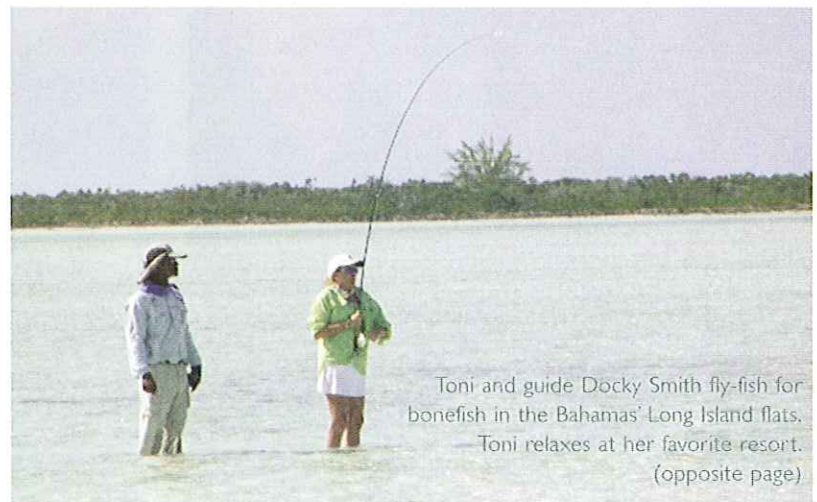
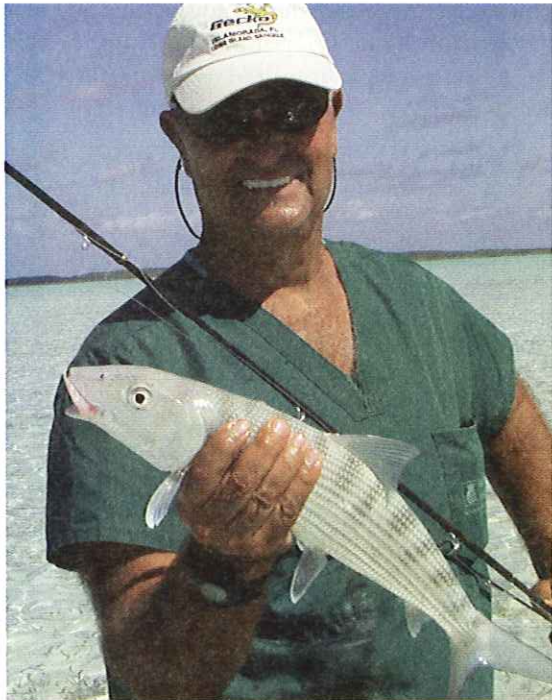
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Toni Bennett shows off her bonefish catch (right) as does her husband Jeff (below).

Photos / Docky Smith



Toni and guide Docky Smith fly-fish for bonefish in the Bahamas' Long Island flats. Toni relaxes at her favorite resort. (opposite page)

FLY-FISHING FOR BONEFISH IN THE BAHAMAS

By Toni Bennett

My husband Jeff and I are avid anglers who live in Islamorada, “The Sport Fishing Capital of the World,” and we love both offshore and back-country fishing. But my favorite places are the beach and the bonefish flats in the Bahamas, specifically Long Island flats.

I’ve been visiting the Bahama Islands for the past 30 years. About five years ago I decided to search for the “perfect out island.” It had to be unspoiled, uncommercialized, uncrowded and beautiful. My perfect out island had to have fabulous fly-fishing for bonefishing, great snorkeling,

great food, wonderful people and no worries of crime. In other words, I wanted paradise.

Starting my search in Exuma, I slept in my favorite resort during the night and bonefished during the day. And from there I flew to Stella Maris Resort Club on the north end of Long Island. My pilot was Joerg, one of the resort’s owners, who introduced passengers to a breathtaking view with water colors I had never seen before.

I rented an oceanfront house and soon had my first day of fly-fishing with a guide named Docky Smith, who

still owns and operates Bonafide Bonefishing. My skills were minimal at that time but I still had the love. What’s not to love when you are out on the water surrounded by beauty?

The next morning, after a delicious breakfast at the Stella Maris hotel, I picked up a box lunch and off I went to meet my guide at the marina.

Docky pilots a Maverick Mirage, among other skiffs, and he has the best equipment. I learned more about fly-fishing for bonefish that day than I had learned in my previous four years of doing it. It was so exciting and I was

actually making good casts by the end of that day!

Docky is a very patient man.

I caught quite a few fish that day, and the next day was even better—for catching numerous fish, some of which weighed five to seven pounds, and for learning tricks that would help me for years to come. And we did not see another boat. It was so peaceful.

Now my husband and I cruise our 31-foot Contender to Long Island for summers. I can't live without these extended adventures. In fact, we even bought a house there. The house is on the rugged Atlantic side, which has the crashing waves and year-around cooling breezes.

My favorite way to bonefish is to wade into the Long Island flats. Those flats are so sandy and beautiful, and thousands of fish are swimming by. Just unbelievable. I have fished with Docky countless days over the years and I don't know how many fish I have caught, yet I still get that elated, excited feeling each



time I leave that dock. I have never had a bad day fishing Long Island, and that is something to be able to say.

But my husband and I don't just fly-fish off Long Island. Sometimes we deep-sea fish, or travel to nearby Conception Island and Rum Cay. We love to explore the coves, caves and beaches, and to snorkel the many reefs.

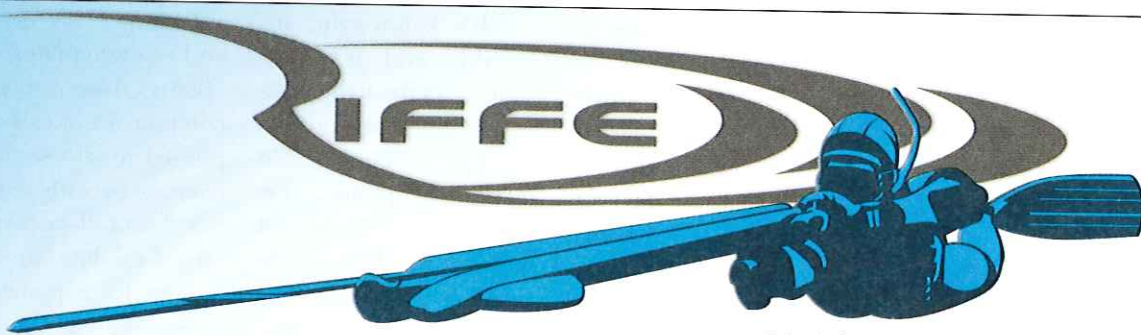
And at night we love to visit the resort and dine on fresh seafood—Docky's wife makes the best lobster and conch salads.

And if we're lucky, the resort is having one of its special parties.

After all, there's nothing better than balancing fishing with a little wonder.

Docky Smith can be reached at docky@bonafidebonefishing.com / www.bonafidebonefishing.com.

For more information on Stella Maris Resort Club contact 1-800-426-0466 / www.stellamarisresort.com.



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