

# San Francisco Examiner



## The strange power of Gump love

Look-alike at Pier 39 [B-1]



St. Mary's

[★]  
Tuesday afternoon  
MARCH 4, 1997

Gaelis earn TVC

San Francisco Examiner

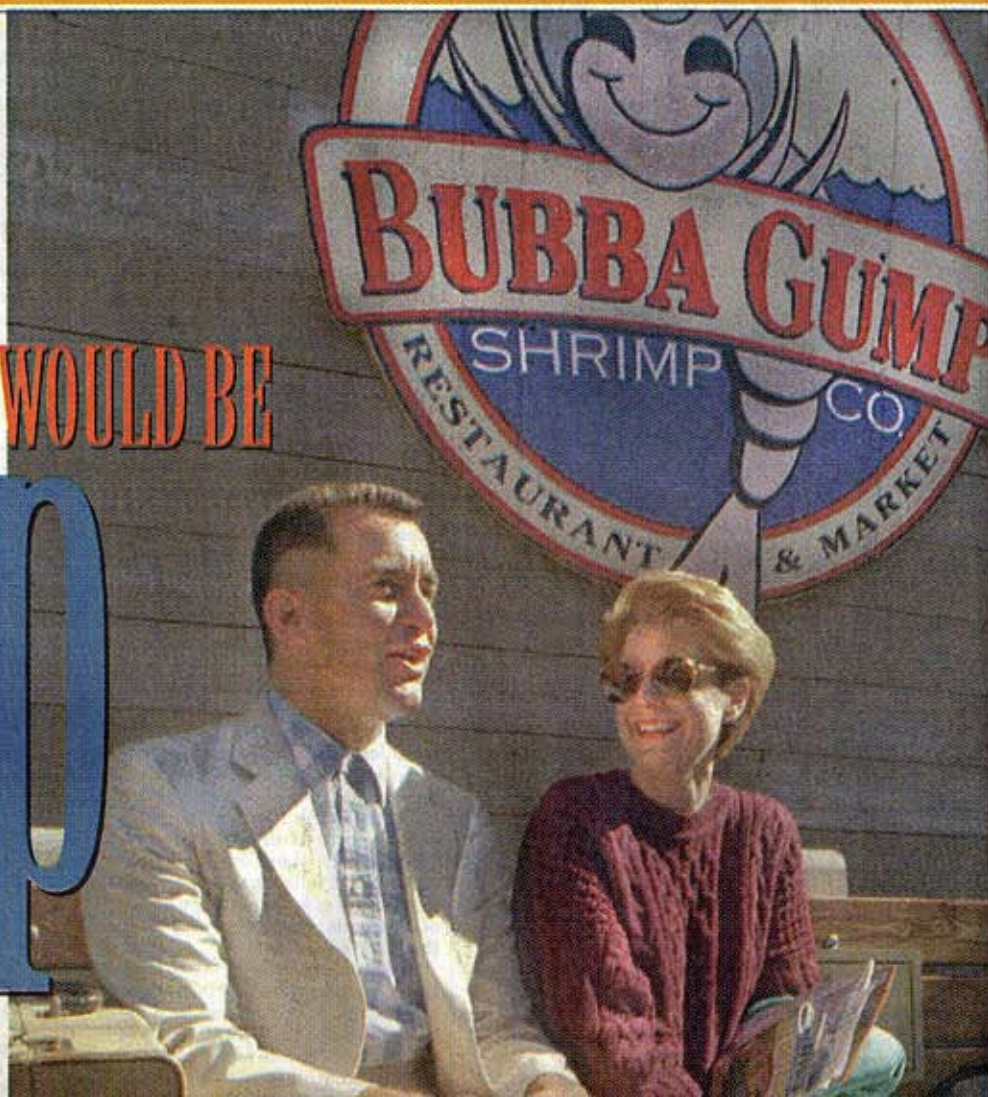
# STYLE

Soft-spoken  
look-alike makes  
nice for Forrest fans  
at Pier 39

# THE MAN WHO WOULD BE Gump

By Julie Hinds  
OF THE EXAMINER STAFF

“TOWYALL doing?” asks Steve Weber in a slow, familiar cadence as he greets customers outside the Bubba Gump Shrimp Co. restaurant on Pier





Soft-spoken  
look-alike makes  
nice for Forrest fans  
at Pier 39

# THE MAN WHO WOULD BE Gump

By Julie Hinds  
OF THE EXAMINER STAFF

**"H**OWYALL doing?" asks Steve Weber in a slow, familiar cadence as he greets customers outside the Bubba Gump Shrimp Co. restaurant on Pier 39. "Where you folks from?"

People see him and smile. They wave. They take a picture. Tourist is as tourist does.

"Ma'am, I may have run in your town," Weber draws to Cheryl Acker of Orfield, Penn., as her husband, Glenn, captures the Kodak moment. "I just felt like running. Then I turned around and ran right back."

Acker fairly glows. "This is a highlight, meeting Forrest Gump," she says. "I'll treasure this moment forever."

It's been three years since America fell for the Tom Hanks character from the 1994 Academy Award-winning movie. That seems like a long time ago, especially since the arrival of twisters, Martians and "Show me the money!"

But Gump love hasn't diminished much, or else Weber, a 38-year-old sales representative from Santa Clara, wouldn't be spending weekends in an off-white suit and grungy sneakers, clutching a suitcase and a box of Russell Stover chocolates.

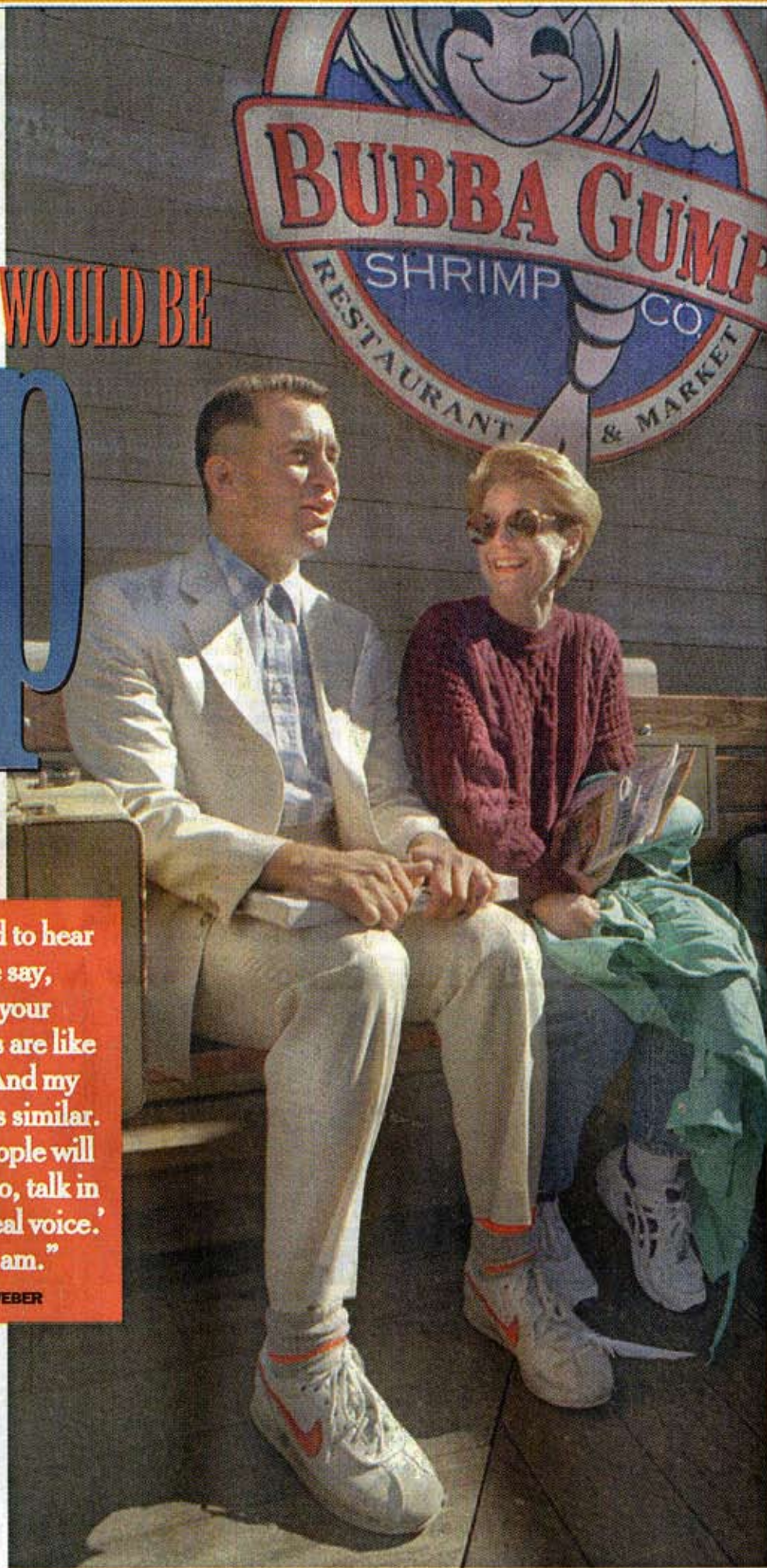
Since last spring, the South Bay resident has

[See GUMP, B-4]

Cheryl Acker of Pennsylvania says her visit with Forrest Gump (a.k.a. Steve Weber) is "a highlight. . . I'll treasure this moment forever."

"I used to hear people say, 'Even your actions are like his.' And my voice is similar. So people will go, 'No, talk in your real voice.' And I am."

- STEVE WEBER





◆ GUMP from B-1

## Forrest look-alike makes nice for fans

been impersonating Forrest Gump every Saturday and Sunday for the Bubba Gump Shrimp Co. on Monterey's busy Cannery Row. Now, on alternate weekends, he does the same act at the Bubba Gump on Pier 39, which opened recently. His job, essentially, is to sit on a bench and be nice to people.

By now, Weber has so perfected his Gumpisms, he can chat with nearly anyone from anywhere and stay in character. When the errant teen tries to impress his friends by being loud, Weber sits quietly and looks puzzled, just as Forrest would.

"When people see Forrest, it makes their experience so huge,"

says Cathy Peterson, director of marketing for Rusty Pelican Restaurants, Paramount Pictures' partner in developing the Bubba Gump Shrimp Co. chain. "It means a lot to them. And Steve is a very, very caring soul."

Soft-spoken and placid even in his off-hours, Weber is happy to talk about his unusual job. "The real transformation begins when I put the suit on," he says.

No, he's never met Tom Hanks, but he has been introduced to Paramount chief Sherry Lansing and "Forrest Gump" producer Steve Tisch. Yes, he's studied the film carefully for phrases and gestures, like Forrest's pronunciation of "but-tocks" and his goofy wave.

"Ironically, many of his facial expressions are very similar to my own," says Weber. "I used to hear people say, 'Even your actions are

like his.' And my voice is similar. So people will go, 'No, talk in your real voice.' And I am."

Being Gump isn't always easy. For one thing, Weber has to get his hair cut every Thursday to maintain the perfect Forrest buzz. And on Mondays, after he's spent two or three days posing and joking for the crowd, he just chills and limits his socializing.

But Weber says it's worth it. "In a way, when I'm Forrest Gump, I'm this beloved figure," he explains. "It's flattering and a lot of fun."

Weber got the job through a combination of genetic luck and sheer persistence. Nearly all his adult life, the Bucks County, Penn., native, who moved to the South Bay in 1981, has been told he resembles Tom Hanks.

"People didn't know his name, but they'd say, 'You look like that

guy on 'Bosom Buddies,'" he recalls. "I never saw the show, I just knew I looked like him or he looked like me."

While Weber worked as a facilities manager, then sold high-tech parts, custom clothing and office furniture, others urged him to pursue being a stand-in for Hanks, but he resisted. "Why would I want to lose my own identity? I had enough of an ego myself."

Then came Gump. After seeing the movie, Weber scoured second-hand stores for an off-white suit and a suitcase and had "a fun night with it" at a Halloween party. Two years later, when he heard about the upcoming Bubba Gump in Monterey, he phoned the restaurant and talked his way into a meeting.

Twenty minutes after he got there, Weber had a job for the

opening weekend. That led to the next weekend, and the next, and the next. Says Weber, "At one point, they said, 'You just keep showing up every weekend until we tell you differently.'"

Although Weber describes his relationship with the restaurant chain as informal, his Gump act has almost become a full-time career. He's still a sales rep, but he's reduced his workload to one office-furniture account, to allow more time for performing at private parties and corporate events. While he doesn't want to get into financial specifics, his goal is eventually to earn more as Gump than he did in sales.

In the future, Weber says, as Bubba Gump restaurants expand to Maui and two more cities this year, plus another 17 cities during the next four years, he plans to travel to the openings. He hopes to keep the Monterey and San Francisco Bubba Gumps as his home base.

If the character becomes less marketable, Weber is prepared for that, too, and says the movie explains it: "(In the film) if you look at the feather, it comes out of the sky and lands," he says. "It just so happens it lands at the feet of Forrest. The feather landed at my feet and I picked it up. And someday I'll probably let it go."