Surf swami
He knows when to catch a wave

By Will Hoover

When Lucas finally phoned, he told Milius 16-foot surf and heavy north winds would arrive on the North Shore in 30 hours. The waves, the storm, Milius, and the film crew all arrived promptly on schedule. The disaster scene came off exactly as planned.

Surprisingly, with so much technology at his disposal, Lucas says the computer plays a secondary role in his surf calculations. Computer models for ocean currents, he says, aren't that precise yet.

"Actually, I don't use a computer that much," says Lucas, "I use weather maps, and satellite photographs, and tables to compute my forecasts. It's basically straightforward stuff."

"Human experience," he says, "That's the key thing. I'm folding in 15 years experience as a surfer and a surf forecaster."

Lucas also predicts that his brand of soothsaying won't be around much longer.

At some point in the not-too-distant future there will be satellites that will measure winds over the open ocean," he says. And when that happens, the data will be available to allow us to run new computer models that presently don't do that well. It will happen automatically.

Until that time, Lucas is so busy with his oceanographic research, he's forced to turn away most consulting requests that come along.

Still, there's one way the astute surfer can get an inside track on what those unpredictable waves will do next — and it doesn't cost a thing.

Just wait for Lucas to head for the shore.

"Well, sometimes when I show up with my board the other surfers say, 'Ah! Roger's here. Surf must be coming up.'"

Invariably, it is.

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Roger Lukas with some of the weather maps and satellite photographs he uses to make surf forecasts.

Adviser photo by Carl Vill