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Horseshoe Crab

What has 10 eyes and at 360 million years old predates the dinosaurs and is found on the Delaware Bayshore? The horseshoe crab of course.

Most locals know of the crab's interrelationship with the migrating shorebirds that devour their eggs on their northward journey to Arctic nesting grounds. But did you know the crab's blood saves humans lives insuring that medicines are free of dangerous bacteria.

In the early 1950s Fredrick Bang discovered that horseshoe crab blood cells contained a clotting agent that bonds with hazardous endotoxins produced by gram-negative bacteria.

In the 1950s it was discovered that chitin, a material found in the crab's carapace, contains wound-healing characteristics. Some bandages and sutures use chitin because of its unique properties. Since chitin sutures don't need to be removed they are especially useful in cases where pain is an issue, such as in burns and skin grafts. At the same time chitin radically hastens the healing process.

Dr. Keffer Hartline won the Nobel Prize in 1967 for optic research utilizing crabs to study the optic nerve's electrical impulses. The compound eyes of the horseshoe crab are often claimed to have been responsible for more optical discoveries than any other living creature.

Optic research on horseshoe crabs continues today to advance medical discoveries. This research may lead to an understanding of how to correct human vision abnormalities.

Someday the horseshoe crab's ten eyes may save your two.