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INSIDE:

The Best Restaurants, Chefs and Sustainable Culinary Arts on 30-A

ANNUAL DINING ISSUE

Food by Restaurant Paradis We have no longer an outside and an inside as two separate things. Now the outside may come inside and the inside may and does go outside. They are of each other.

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– Frank Lloyd Wright

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letter from the publisher

THE CONNECTION OF DINING



2020 has undoubtedly been one of the world's most challenging years in a long time. Let's hope 2021 brings us more solutions and connections to what we love most. Family, friends, and security.

Now, more than ever, we can appreciate the importance of one of life's greatest and most simple pleasures. Dining out. A good meal out gives us a sense of relaxation, connection, and excitement. The artistry of a good chef, combined with fresh ingredients and proper execution is nourishing to our soul.

As we enter into a new, fresh year, we bring you some of 30-A's greats. We hope you enjoy trying out these fantastic culinary gems of 30-A as much as we have.

Let's all hope for better days ahead. And let's celebrate our greatest gift: Connection to each other and celebrating life's simple pleasures.

Bon Apetito,

Miles K. Neiman

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Send inquiries to 227 Sandy Springs Place, Suite D-288, Sandy Springs, GA 30328. Send press releases and e-mails to miles@thirtyareview.com

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Publisher/Editor-in-Chief

Miles K. Neiman

Managing Editor Jennifer Thompson

Graphic Design

Brenda J. Oliver -Cover Design & Magazine Layout Sharon Jollay - Ads

Photography Jacqueline Ward

Contributing Writers

Jessica Badour Susan Benton Andy Butcher Susan Cannizzaro Julie Herron Carson Wendy O. Dixon **Tess Farmer** Tom Fitzpatrick Tracey M. Hawkins Ellen Howle Anne Hunter Denise K. James Alden Mahler Levine Christopher Manson Courtney Murray Bart Precourt Liesel Schmidt Kimberly Watson Sewell **Ridgeley Standard** Mary Welch Mary Kathryn Woods

Ad Sales: miles@thirtyareview.com

Distribution Manager: Warren Butler

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Pescado



Black Bear Bar

by Andy Butcher

ake a little New York City trendiness, mix in a splash of West Coast style, and zest with some gold old Southern spice, and you end up with the fresh taste of Black Bear Bread Co.'s distinctive Bar Room. In a relatively short time, the wine bar/light eatery, tucked away in the Shops of Grayton at Grayton Beach, has seen its profile rise as satisfyingly as the signature sourdough pulled from the nearby bakery that started the whole Black Bear thing.

What began a few years ago as a bit of an experiment by Phil McDonald, then chef at long-time 30-A restaurateur Dave Rauschkolb's Seaside Bud & Alley's Pizza Bar, has since morphed into an everevolving Black Bear Bread Co. brand that has earned the co-owners a number of foodie plaudits in the business's short four-year history.

Among them was a spot in Southern Living Magazine's "The South's Best Bars 2020" for the Bar Room. That nod came for the way, in a crowded local food scene, the location has carved out a creative niche with its focus on natural wines, tasty shareables, and a relaxed vibe. Sparely accented with striking black and gold, the white-walled space is available for private events, with wine tastings also on offer, and there's live music three nights a week.

The Bar Room brings together an eclectic set of influences from now-executive chef McDonald's kitchen career, which took him from Brooklyn to San Francisco and New Orleans before returning to the Emerald Coast—he's a Destin boy—to work with former surfing buddy Rauschkolb.

Ask him to sum up the result of all those elements at the Bar Room and he will give you a suitably one-word answer: minimalist. The less-is-more approach is evident from the biodynamic wines, through the unfussy plates, cheeseboards and charcuterie, to the striking but simple décor. "Elegant without being stuffy," he says.

Championing the emerging natural wines market, the Bar Room has some 70 bottles on its list, sourced from across Europe and the United States. "We look for the winemaker's story and their practices—dry vineyards, no irrigation," McDonald explains. "It's not just about the environment, though, it's also about the result. Natural wines are less 'overdone'," he says. "They don't mess with it; it's basically grapes, fermented. You're getting the true product."



There is a \$10 corkage fee, but bottles (starting at \$17) sell at retail price and come with hand-written staff recommendation tags like you'd find in a bookstore.

The wines may come from afar, but most everything else is sourced as locally as possible. Bread from next door, of course. Then seafood from the Gulf and grassfed beef for the 7 oz. burger from a farm in Chipley.

With its emphasis on fresh-prepared—the oysters are shucked in plain view right behind the u-shaped bar, where many of the other offerings are also plated—the menu is seasonal and tweaked almost daily. Customer favorites include clam toast, beef carpaccio, and snapper ceviche. Lest anyone fear that it's all a bit too frou-frou, there's also bottles of Miller and Budweiser available in addition to some regional crafts. "Just to let people know we're not that bougie," McDonald says with a chuckle.

Bypassing culinary school, McDonald developed his distinctive culinary in the kitchen trenches. His resulting guiding philosophy: don't overdo it. "Over time, you learn to take away," he says, "strip it to what it is so you can taste, otherwise it's gray."

Having finally perfected good bread at Rauschkolb's Grayton Beach events catering location, the pair began selling it at Seaside's Farmers Market. With increasing demand, they decided to open a breakfast and lunch cafe just a few steps from the ovens, at The Shops at Grayton, in 2017. With its fresh-baked goodies and Stumptown Coffee Roasters quality java, it soon became an early morning favorite for locals and visitors alike.

The partners extended into the neighboring unit in 2019, debuting their Bar Room. Meanwhile, they were





also adding another Black Bear cafe location at Grand Boulevard, Destin; it opened last year, though space limitations there preclude Bar Room features and hours.

Last year's enforced COVID-19 shutdown gave McDonald and Rauschkolb the chance to catch their breath and review their fast-growing Black Bear partnership, whose name recognizes their first satisfied "customer"—the black bear who raided the bakery's trash bins for its trashed leaven. During the closure they added a covered outside deck that doubled the Bar Room's seating capacity, introducing extended evening hours when things opened up again in the summer.

In keeping with the business's fast-moving history, there are further expansion plans afoot. At time of writing these included a Bar Room spin-off in the area, somewhere McDonald foresaw as "a little more culinaryforward, more kitchen-cooked."

Black Bear Bread Co. Bar Room, 26 Logan Lane, Unit G, Grayton Beach, FL 32459, www.blackbearbreadco. com, (850) 213-4528, events@blackbearbreadco.com Hours: Sunday: Closed, Monday-Wednesday: 11a.m. to 9pm., Thursday-Saturday: 11a.m. to 10p.m.. No reservations

Growing on the Gulf Bud & Alley's Restaurant Set to Unveil its Expansion in Seaside BY TESS FARMER

Our goal is to bring more of the sweeping Gulf views and open-air dining that our guests love and appreciate.

fter 35 years in Seaside, Bud and Alley's Waterfront Restaurant and Bar is undergoing a major enhancement project and unveiling improvements, including an expansive rooftop deck this summer.

Whether just coming off the beach for a crab cake at lunch, celebrating a milestone life event, or a toast with friends at sunset, generations of visitors and locals alike have been making memories at the iconic restaurant anchoring Seaside's commercial district on the south side of Highway 30-A.

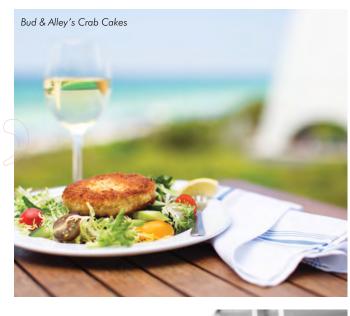
"Our loyal customers keep returning year after year and we are always looking for ways to give back to them in the ways of atmosphere and fresh coastal cuisine," says owner Dave Rauschkolb.

Bud & Alley's was one of the first and is now among the few beachfront fine dining options along Highway 30A. It's a beloved institution that over the years has helped make Seaside what it is today.

Improvements and expansion of the building include a bell tower with elevator, ten new restrooms, upgraded roof deck, and a road-side portion of the restaurant providing a new vantage point looking out and over the town center. Noted author and former town architect Dhiru Thadani of Seaside completed the design of the project with a focus on incorporating the old with the new.

Rauschkolb has expanded his restaurant business as the town of Seaside has grown. He and business partner Scott Witcotski established Bud & Alley's in the early days of the burgeoning coastal community's development in the 80s. The restaurant opened in January of 1986 and was named for Seaside founder Robert Davis's dachshund and Witcotski's cat. The restaurant soon developed a loyal following that continues today, three decades later.

"It's been an incredible opportunity to be a part of the fabric of Seaside and our local community here," says Rauschkolb. He adds that the restaurant's expansion



project, which includes additional dining space on the roof deck and the lookout bell tower, wasn't necessarily to make room for more guests but to enhance the Bud & Alley's experience and provide new vantage points to the Gulf and overlooking Central Square. "The customer experience on the roof deck will be much improved because you'll be able to sit at the bar and look out over the Gulf," Rauschkolb says. "Our goal is to bring more of the

love and appreciate."

sweeping Gulf views and open-air dining that our guests

An additional 850 square feet has been added to the dining area upstairs, providing more room and views of central square to the north side of 30-A as well as the Gulf of Mexico. The road-side portion of the restaurant will offer a grab-and-go extension of Bud & Alley's.

Rauschkolb and his team's devotion to farm- and sea-to-table dining extends to two other casual eateries overlooking the Gulf in Seaside. The Pizza Bar's authentic stylings of wood-fired artisan pizza pies are direct from the cucina's of Italy, while the Taco Bar's fresh flavors and funky vibe are reminiscent of the authentic taquerias on the Mexican border. The Taco Bar has also expanded to include more kitchen space and a wraparound roadside bar.



Photo by Marla Carter Photography

Grilled Gulf Fish of the Day



Photos by Alissa Aryn Photography

As much as things have grown and changed in Seaside and along 30-A, many things remain constant at Bud & Alley's, including the fresh local seafood (the crab cakes being the gold standard), ice-cold cocktails, and friendly atmosphere. A longstanding tradition is the ringing of a cast-iron bell from an 1888 steam train each day at sunset; the bell will be housed in the new bell tower.

"Our motto from day one has been good food, good people, good times," Rauschkolb says. "And it still rings true almost 35 years later. We're looking forward to the next three decades."

The Bud & Alley's team is also made up of Chief of Operations Michael Broadway and Executive Chef David Bishop. Rauschkolb credits their unwavering dedication and leadership for the continued success of the restaurant.

Bud & Alley's is open daily for lunch and dinner. It supports local farmers and fisherman, including GreenMan's Garden, Covey Rise Farms, WaterStreet Seafood, Cool Fish Seafood, and Louisiana Lagniappe. For more information and to make reservations visit budandalleys.com or call (850) 231-5900.

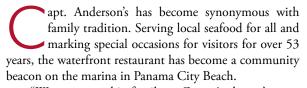
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Capt. Anderson's Restaurant & Waterfront Market Landmark Restaurant Continues to Celebrate Milestones Alongside Generations of Customers and Friends

by Tess Farmer





"We come as a big family to Capt. Anderson's every June for my brother's birthday... It's his request each year that we all meet there, and he always gets the steak and lobster," says Kansas Pitts, Santa Rosa Beach resident. "It's a true experience, with the kids getting to watch the fishing boats come in and all the fish caught that day. It's become a special place for our family... and of course the crab claws and homemade desserts are amazing!"

Two brothers, Jimmy and Johnny Patronis, took over the restaurant in 1967, which was then a small breakfast house; and with hard work and dedication created what it is today. Patriarchs of both their families and the community, both were successful businessmen and philanthropists in Panama City and beyond. Jimmy Patronis, Sr. passed away this January (2020) at the age of 88; Johnny is 91 and still stops in at the restaurant to visit with guests. The second and third generations of the Patronis's family now run the restaurant, which has grown to seat 725 and serving dinner six nights a week to over 250,000 guests during the eight-month season.

This classic restaurant has always believed in quality and simplicity. No heavy sauces are used here. As Johnny Patronis explains, "Nothing should drown the natural goodness of fresh, fresh fish. Just let it absorb a little of the aroma of oak from the coals... drizzle with a little extra virgin olive oil... a squeeze of lemon... maybe a touch of oregano and serve it while it's still hot. You know, we were the first on this coast to cook like this over real hardwood coals. But on the coast of Greece where my family grew up, it has been a tradition for hundreds... maybe thousands of years!"

Add fresh baked bread and a perfect bottle of wine and it's a true culinary experience. When it comes to Panama City Beach restaurants, Capt. Anderson's is among the elite, consistently winning the best restaurant and best seafood categories in Bay County; it was also recipient of the "Best Seafood Restaurant" award from Southern Living magazine.

Capt. Anderson's is one of those rare family restaurants that not only survives, but strengthens and improves through the years. Every year the restaurant has witnessed remarkable growth without loss of quality. It's also the only Bay County restaurant to receive Wine Spectator's 2020 Award of Excellence, and has been an annual recipient since 2005.

Yonnie Patronis, one of Jimmy's four sons, has been instrumental in this element of the restaurant's success which led to the founding of Capt. Anderson's Wine Club in 2017. "This doesn't feel like a job for me, it's a true joy and passion," says Yonnie Patronis. "The relationships built in this building over the years are very powerful, it's like one big family, everyone knows each other and supports each other." His daughter Anna





Patronis is also involved in the daily operations and is the restaurant's resident wine sommelier.

"There's the Captain's Cellar selections, which offer unparalleled wine varieties. Here you'll find some of the most unique regions and wine makers," says Anna Patronis. "The wine club offers three memberships with one thing in common: each comes with a collection of

very rare highly-allocated wines and/or champagne valued higher than the cost of membership."

Members also have a chance to participate in the annual trip to Champagne, France for tours, tastings and education from the top wineries there. Plus, throughout the year, all Capt. Anderson's Wine Club members save on wine and champagne purchases and receive insider offers on rare wines as they become available. "For the wine aficionados, locals and visitors alike, it's a perfect match, plus some really wonderful friendships have been made over the years," says Anna Patronis.

"I've watched children sitting in high-chairs who are now putting their own children in high-chairs," adds Yonnie Patronis. "There are couples who celebrate each and every anniversary with us. We are proud to continue to offer the family-oriented service and the freshest food, and plan on doing so for many more years to come."

5551 North Lagoon Drive, Panama City, (850) 234-2225; www.captandersons.com; Monday – Saturday, Restaurant opens at 4 p.m. Seafood market opens at 3:30 p.m.

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Destin Ice Market Experience Coastal Fine Dining at Home

by Tess Farmer

hat are we all looking for when we just arrive at the beach? After catching the stellar winter sunset, you may be thinking about some fresh local seafood for dinner. With many restaurants restricted to limited seating, oftentimes it is easier, for larger groups especially, to prepare meals at home. Destin Ice Market 30A offers everything you may need to prepare a fresh, in-season, high-quality meal in the comfort of your own home... or home away from home... on 30-A.

Pam and Tim Wellborn are owners and proprietors of Destin Ice Market 30A and opened their doors for

business in Inlet Beach in 2016. Destin Ice Market offers fresh, local, and sustainable seafood; as well as high quality meat from Halperns in Atlanta and poultry from nearby Joyce Farms, raised without pesticides, animal by-products, hormones, or antibiotics. The market also has every single item you'd possibly need for a stellar charcuterie board with an array of fine cheeses, preserves and jams, hand-sliced prosciutto, olives, crackers, pickled produce, and fresh fruit. Who's hungry?

"It's our goal to provide the best quality in terms of freshness, sustainability and taste to all our customers and make their vacations as easy as possible," says Pam Wellborn.

Entertaining friends and family is a way of life for her. Growing up in the kitchen and having access to fresh, organic, and sustainable food sources, she appreciates access to the very best ingredients. The Destin Ice Market 30A represents that passion.

Wellborn is also a certified sommelier and certified specialist of wine which has led her to procure an impressive selection of wines offered at the market. "We have many rare and unique options that can't be found here in the immediate area, which many of our customers appreciate," she says.

The location of Destin Ice Market 30A also makes accessibility easy for visitors to Inlet Beach, Rosemary Beach, and the east end of 30-A in particular. It's also on the way to 30-A from the Northwest Florida Beaches International Airport in Panama City Beach and will be walkable from Rosemary Beach with the addition of the Highway 98 pedestrian underpass.

"We have customers who stop by on their way into town to pick out a protein—whether that's the catch of the day, fresh Gulf shrimp, or prime cut steak—a couple of steakhouse sides and vegetables and they are set for dinner," says Wellborn. "On the way out of town, some stop in to ship shrimp or fish so they can take a piece of the Gulf home with them." That's a souvenir to beat!

Pam Wellborn is originally from northern Alabama



and Tim from Pensacola. They have been partners in life and business for many years, including partnership in two local popular restaurants, Cuvee Destin and Cuvee 30A. They eventually met Destin Ice owners Jim Bass and Dwane Martin during their time working for the Destin restaurant and they encouraged the couple to create Destin Ice Market 30A. The relationship with Jim and Dwane immediately brought decades of purchasing experience with The Destin Fishing Fleet to this location. Most of the seafood is provided by Destin Ice still today but they also purchase from many other local purveyors

and sustainable fisherman in the area.

In 2018 Pam invited Executive Chef Alan Baltazar, who she worked with at Cuvee Bistro, to become chef and manager for Destin Ice Market 30A. Originally from Wisconsin, Baltazar has run some of the nation's finest kitchens in Wisconsin, Colorado, and now on the Emerald Coast. Since joining the Destin Ice Market 30A, he leads the team in preparations of the local seafood sold at the market; whether that be steamed shellfish or stone crabs, specialty side dishes and homemade desserts. Chef Alan is constantly adding new items to the market's already extensive collection of fine foods.

"We've had feedback from customers, especially after the pandemic restrictions, who are eating at home more on their beach vacations and are able to enjoy nice dinners with their family incorporating fresh, local ingredients," says Wellborn. "The holidays were also busy with special order seafood, meats and wines and a new menu of side dishes... and who doesn't enjoy lobster mac and cheese on Christmas Eve?!"

Pam and Chef Alan invite you to shop with them and know they offer the very best from the oceans as well as from sustainable farms and specialty vendors.

Destin Ice Market 30A, Crossings at Inlet Beach; Open daily, 9 a.m. – 6 p.m.; (850) 502-4100; wwwdestinicemarket30A.com







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Edward's Fine Food and Wine Offers Laid-Back Atmosphere with Great Cuisine BY DENISE K. JAMES

dward's Fine Food and Wine has deep roots in the Rosemary Beach community, from the restaurant's early days onward. Opened by local chef Ed Reese and part of the Spell Restaurant Group since 2017, many things have remained constant at Edward's and kept loyal patrons returning—namely, the quality ingredients on the menu.

"While the restaurant has continued to evolve with an extensive remodel, new menu items, and an award-winning wine list, it continues to serve the freshest, locally sourced ingredients," says Christy Spell Terry, who runs Spell Restaurant Group with her father and business partner, Rick Spell.

Edward's was the perfect addition to the Spell Restaurant Group's collection of six dining establishments on the Florida Gulf Coast. Considering all six have different concepts and each one offers something delicious, foodies who live on the Gulf or who frequently vacation in the area have likely dined at others on the list: La Crema for Spanish tapas; Grits & Grind for breakfast favorites; La Cocina for Latin fare; Saltwater Grill for steaks and seafood; and George's for Southern coastal cuisine. The Spell Restaurant Group also has establish-

ments in Memphis, Tennessee and Jackson, Mississippi.

"Each of our restaurants is special in its own way, with Edward's providing a high-quality dining experience without the formality," says Terry. "We welcome you to enjoy a meal with us in your best shorts and flip-flops!"

The highlight of Edward's is its dedication to partnering with small local farms and purveyors to ensure seasonal and fresh ingredients at all times. As of this article, Terry and the rest of the restaurant staff were looking forward to heirloom tomatoes and South Carolina peaches, both seasonal during the balmy summer months and perfect for use in special salads, appetizers, and desserts.

Thanks to the talents of Chef Josh Smith, mouthwatering features on the Edward's menu change regularly and are perfectly paired with the wine list. Popular items that restaurant patrons regularly ask for include the za'atar crusted yellowfin tuna, the heritage pork chop with tomato chutney, the grilled blackened grouper, and the jumbo lump crab cakes, according to Terry.





With happy hour from 5 until 6 p.m. seven days a week, it's easy to reward yourself with a well-priced bottle to accompany a meal. Or try a specialty wine cocktail, such as the Edward's Champagne Cocktail, with fresh berries, sparkling, and Cocchi Americano; or the White Wine Moscow Mule, with white wine, ginger beer, mint, strawberries, and lime. If you and your table can't finish the whole bottle, a friendly server is happy to package the rest up for enjoyment at home. Guests can also elect to bring wine from their own personal collection for a \$25 corking fee. In regard to recent concerns surrounding the Covid-19 virus, Edward's is taking care to make customers feel comfortable and happy. As with the entire Spell

Group of restaurants, safety and cleanliness is para-

mount. Because Edward's

has an abundance of outdoor

seating — in front of the restaurant on Main Street, as

well as in the courtyard — patrons can choose to

"spread out and enjoy the

fresh air while they dine,"

according to Terry. She adds

that all state and federal guidelines are carefully fol-

lowed, including masks and

temperature checks for staff,

cleaning and sanitizing tables

between parties, and half-

nature of Rosemary Beach

— a tight-knit community where neighbors trust each oth-

er's restaurant endorsements ----

makes Edward's a continued

success-as well as the dedica-

tion of the experienced staff. "Just a few months ago, none

of us could have imagined the

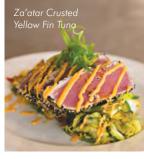
new world we all live in now,"

she says. "However, with the

Terry adds that the

capacity seating.





strong management and staff we have in place at Edward's, we are confident it will continue to thrive in Rosemary Beach.

"Our staff, with its many years of service, pay attention to details to ensure each guest has a wonderful experience. Our meals are memorable, which brings guests back. We are part of a close community on 30-A, and we have valued guests who continue to visit from across the country," she concludes.

To find out more about Edward's Fine Food and Wine, visit their website at edwards30a.com, or call them at (850) 231-0550. The restaurant is open from 5 p.m. until 9 p.m. daily, on a first-come, first-served basis.

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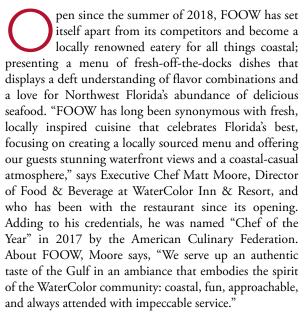
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A Different Fish

by Liesel Schmidt





While FOOW's imperative of impeccable service and the highest quality of cuisine offering might imply a white-tablecloth ambiance and stuffy atmosphere, they manage to maintain a friendly vibe that welcomes everyone to walk through their doors; from those coming in off the beach to those who just want a night out. "FOOW is Southern hospitality at its best," says Chef Moore. "We want you to feel like you're at an old school café where you see familiar faces and you never have to worry about what to wear." And despite the fact that their food certainly plays an integral part of drawing diners, it is their breathtaking views and unique interior that clinches the deal, creating the perfect place to just sit, relax with a fantastic meal and a great drink, and marvel at the beauty. "The best seat in the house is always guaranteed," Chef Moore says of the restaurant's glass walls, which showcase breathtaking views from We serve up an authentic taste of the Gulf in an ambiance that embodies the spirit of the WaterColor community: coastal, fun, approachable, and always attended with impeccable service.

every seat. Wall art by local artist Justin Gaffrey adds to the restaurant's vibrant yet relaxed atmosphere, and the FOOW room provides private parties with a more intimate dining setting amidst an extensive and extremely impressive wine cellar.

Clearly, the importance of setting the scene was not lost on FOOW's owners, who recently completed a redesign led by designer and architect Cooper Carry of The Johnson Studio. The newly imagined space highlights Gulf views and capitalizes on the nearness of South Walton's white sand beaches. The design also incorporates an open kitchen as well as an expanded Gulf view bar that wraps from the interior to the exterior, seamlessly unifying the two concepts. Continuing the coastal theme are cool seaside colors and warm hickory



woods, offset with textures and patterns that show an understanding of style, perfectly set against massive windows that flood the space with natural sunlight and provide the perfect viewpoint for watercolor-like sunsets.

With views like that, one might forget to look at what is presented on one's plate, but Chef Moore and the cooks in his kitchen make sure that their offerings are no less impressive than the vistas beheld by their guests. Standing firmly on their standard of creating everything in house and putting creativity into every dish, FOOW has devised a menu of delicious signatures featuring fresh caught Gulf seafood and premium steaks, as well as unique Southern comfort-inspired items like Fish Dip and Sweet Tea Chicken. A particular point of pride-and display of determination-are their FOOW Toasts. "We started making sourdough in-house, even though we were unsure about whether or not we could sustain that type of bread in such a small facility, with such limited bakery resources. We soon decided it was worth the result and just figured out the logistics," says Chef Matt of the new addition to the menu: three different toasts that include their own version of tomato bruschetta with a local buttermilk farm cheese, one with Gulf shrimp and avocado, and a pimento cheese toast. "You can't get more Southern than that!"

Whatever they put their hand to, FOOW and the team behind it are clearly determined to stand out and not fit in. And this is one case where being different definitely works in their favor.

FOOW is located at 34 Goldenrod Circle, Santa Rosa Beach, Florida 32459. For more information, call (850) 534-5050 or visit www.foow30a.com.

Lola Coastal Italian BY JESSICA HOLTHAUS BADOUR

Build it and they will come... But will they still come if there's a pandemic? Turns out, in this case, they will. At least that's been the result so far with Lola Coastal Italian, open in Rosemary Beach since June 2020. Today it's one of the best casual dining spots on 30-A, but the concept nearly didn't come to fruition after the lease was signed in February.

"We struck a deal to cut the space down and begin building out the restaurant," says Chef Tom Catherall. "Halfway through, everything was shutting down [due to COVID-19] and we had to decide if we should power through or cut our losses."

Quite the timing. But Catherall says he and wife Lisa made the right decision to forge ahead with the project. And since Lola opened its doors, momentum has gained rapidly.

Tom's name on the marquee helped with initial recognition; those familiar with Catherall's restaurant empire in Atlanta couldn't believe a new location had popped up here in the Panhandle. Those who didn't know about his

award-winning reputation (he's one of only 67 Certified Master Chefs nationwide) have immediately become familiar.

If you're curious about the restaurant's namesake, it's inspired threefold: By Catherall's former Lola Bellini Bar in Atlanta, famous 50's Italian actress Gina Lollobrigida, and the song Lola by the Kinks.

"Tom always said he was a rock star in another life," Lisa says with a laugh. "He's a rock star in the kitchen instead of on stage."

Customers agree, touting the food as the best on 30-A. Yelp.com mirrors

that sentiment with over 25 five-star reviews; not only for the food, but also the staff and service.

"You're only as good as the last meal you served," Catherall says. "I've got medals and awards out the wazoo; but that doesn't matter. If you use quality ingredients and affordable pricing, people will come, and that's what I've built my reputation on."

As for the seafood spin, the chef has worked with fish his entire 50+ year career. While he's known for Asian and Chinese influences, the Gulf Coast offers a





plethora of fresh options to put into menu staples, like ever-popular peel & eat shrimp, and daily specials such as local snapper and grouper. Then there are Italian must-haves: meatballs, fresh pasta with homemade sauces of your choice, classic chicken parm, and woodfired pizzas. The dough is made from scratch each morning using imported double-zero flour, meats, and cheeses from Italy—and the pizzas sell out daily. While customers say it's the best they've ever tasted, equal orders of the fresh pasta are flying out of the kitchen, too. The restaurant prides itself on five-star food with quick and easy service—something you can appreciate after a day at the beach or when dining out with the kids. Guests order at the counter and pick up drinks, while food orders are run from the kitchen without formal table service.

"This is the first time I've done this type of service at a restaurant and it really works," Catherall explains. "I'm very happy with everything here right now, and the guests keep coming back."

Lisa helped with the restaurant's beach-chic design. Working front of the house, she aims to speak to every customer, ensuring the dining experience is top-notch.

"Lola is casual but elegant," she describes. "You can walk in here dressed off the beach, or ready to start the night for a bachelorette party."

On top of great food, there's daily happy hour specials with a stocked wine list and full bar. Guests can enjoy live music from local guitarist Jim Couch Thursday to Saturday outside. The rest of the time, 70s pop music keeps the vibe fun right through closing time. The restaurant's beach-chic atmosphere is casual but elegant.



While the winter season this year may bring more unknowns, Lola Coastal Italian plans to remain open year-round. If you're a local, be sure to mention it when you place your order (Florida residents get a 10% local discount).

Chef Catherall has plans to deliver his

woodfired pizzas within a 3-mile radius here on 30-A throughout the winter, so be sure to give a honk (and place an order) when you see the Lola scooter zipping through town.

Lola Coastal Italian is located at 10343 E County Hwy 30A in Rosemary Beach, open daily for happy hour and dinner. They offer dine-in, curbside pickup, and no-contact delivery. See the current menu and daily hours at cheftomcatherall.com, call (850) 541-9440, email cheftomcatherall@gmail.com, and follow on Facebook.

Gyro Heroes Work Here Seaside's Beloved Airstream Husband-Wife Team Presses on After Uncertain Summer

by Christopher Manson

he best Mediterranean food I have tried, and I've been to many different Turkish and Greek restaurants... this place serves the most delicious and authentic food."

Review of Seaside's Mr. Gyro Hero on Facebook

On an unusually crisp fall day well after the normal lunch hour, Seaside's Airstream Row is packed with hungry visitors. Although Burak and Olga Akkan opened their Mr. Gyro Hero less than a year ago, positive word of mouth appears to have spread.

The 10-year veterans of the Saturday Seaside Farmers Market opened for business in March 2020 but had to close for over two months due to Covid-19 quarantine demands. The Akkans reopened at the end of May and ended up having a busy summer.

"We don't know how it will be normally, since this is our first year for the airstream," says Olga during a well-earned break. "It's been challenging—managing the lines, keeping people six feet apart. You see how it is now, imagine what it was like in July!"

Business has been good, and Olga says the only problem during the busy season was being understaffed. "We have other people who work, but we couldn't cover all the shifts. A lot of seasonal workers couldn't come out here. My husband and I are here all the time."

The Mr. Gyro Hero menu choices offer much more than you could imagine from such a

small space. The most popular items are the gyros, chicken kabob, and homemade hummus. Vegetarian and vegan options are available as well, along with salads (Greek and gyro, made from organic and locally grown ingredients); breakfast (wraps and a Mediterranean option that serves one or two); and, for dessert, homemade baklava.

The couple's dream come true is the first thing you'll spot when you drive, walk, or bike into Seaside from the west end. The comic book motif of the Airstream instantly catches the eye. It was designed by Central Idea Agency's David DeGregorio, and Olga says the signage was one of the most challenging tasks she and Burak had to face prior to opening.



It should be pointed out that Olga's face mask sports the Mr. Gyro Hero logo. They're not for sale—yet.

As for the future, Olga says, "It's hard to make any plans right now because of the time that we live in. We're trying to live day by day, trying to see what's going to happen. We definitely don't want to close down again. Our top priority is to survive the year and stay healthy."

She does hope to attract many of the locals who know and love them from the Seaside Farmers Market. "The summer was more of a tourist thing, but now that it's cooling down, we're starting to see a lot more of the locals. We're very happy to see them stopping by."

The couple live in Destin and have two children—a boy, age 4, and a one-year-old girl. Olga's mother and

The summer was more of a tourist thing, but now that it's cooling down, we're starting to see a lot more of the locals. We're very happy to see them stopping by.

Burak's parents help take care of the children while the Akkans keep Mr. Gyro Hero running. "We are trying to be home (with them), at least one of us," Olga says. "Deniz, our son, is already cooking. He can make sandwiches and salads."

When asked if they're good, she says, "They're good for me!" Olga and Burak didn't push the kid to start preparing food. "You know kids, they do what they want!

"We had to do all the inspections and everything by ourselves," Olga says of the other challenges she and Burak faced prior to opening. "This is a different type of business. For me, it was a very new experience as far as setting up the company, acquiring licenses, buying equipment, and finding someone to build the kitchen inside the Airstream.

"It's hard to do. You have limited space, and you're serving hundreds of people a day. We have shelves, fridges, grills in there. Once we opened, we realized this is the kitchen we wanted."

In their spare time, the Akkans enjoy traveling skiing in Ukraine and spending quality time with Burak's relatives in Turkey. And of course, they love the beach.

Mr. Gyro Hero is open daily from 10:30 a.m. to 8 p.m. and is located at 2215 E. County Highway 30-A, Airstream Row, Santa Rosa Beach, Florida 32459. Call (850) 376-5864 for more information and check them out on Facebook and Instagram.

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Kitchen Takeover Private Chef Service Plate to Plate Brings Fine Dining to You

BY TESS FARMER

Plate to Plate not only curates an incredibly impressive custom menu for you, but they also give you more time for conversation and laughter with your friends, which is really what this is all about.

e've all been there. Overcrowded restaurant. Kids melting down. Grandpa's still circling the block for a parking spot... Rather than going out to dinner after a long day at the beach, a service called Plate to Plate invites you to enlist one of their private chefs to prepare a personalized meal right in the comfort of your home (or home away from home). Whether it's a twilight dinner for two or a gathering of friends, special occasion, family meal or grand party, Plate to Plate steps in to take care of it all.

"You do the relaxing while we create a memorable experience for you and your family," says Kali Davis, Plate to Plate executive chef and CEO. "The 30-A area, all the way to Destin, is the perfect place to offer our in-home personal chef experiences and we are here to help make our clients' stays at the beach even more enjoyable."

Even as a young girl, Destin native Kali Davis would create elaborate dinner parties for her friends and family, using her mom's credit card to buy the best cuts of meat and planning multiple courses. Davis worked as a personal chef after attending Johnson and Wales University's culinary program in Miami. Then, after earning her culinary arts degree and working for One Bal Harbour Resort and Spa in Miami (now the Ritz Carlton Bal Harbour), and Bloom in Wynwood, Florida, she returned to the Panhandle to create Plate to Plate and is now expanding the services to other Florida cities.



"My experience cooking for a wide variety of cultures and cuisines led me to want to discover what other local communities have to offer," says Davis. From culinary student to culinary expert, she has truly immersed herself in perfecting her craft and is training a group of up-and-coming chefs to bring her unique personal dining experience to more and more people across the state.

Davis and her team have prepared in-home meals for celebrity clientele as well as professional athletes and coaches who visit the beaches along the Emerald Coast. "The best part of my job is connecting with our clients and having the opportunity to play a small yet memorable role during their vacation."

FRESH AND SIMPLE

Using locally-sourced ingredients and seasonal produce, Plate to Plate prides itself on the freshness of ingredients to bring a high quality product to the table. Whether their clients are planning a seafood boil in Santa Rosa Beach or stone crab dinner in Miami, Plate to Plate chefs take the local environment into consideration, in addition to any special dietary restrictions or tastes to prepare a delicious meal and memorable experience.

"We love hosting dinner parties, but it's too easy to get stuck in the kitchen, when we'd much rather spend time with our guests," says Mike Ragsdale of The 30A Company. "Plate to Plate not only curates an incredibly impressive custom menu for you, but they also give you more time for conversation and laughter with your friends, which is really what this is all about."

"We consider ourselves a partner with our clients to accommodate their needs—whether it's creating a Keto-friendly menu, prepping and cooking the red snapper you caught on a fishing charter that morning, or baking mom's favorite chocolate cake for a surprise birthday celebration, we've done it all," adds Davis. "We thrive on that person to person experience."

"Meals for my family are sacred, it's a time for people to come together, to reconnect, to laugh and to love," says Richard Olivarez, chief marketing officer for Ocean Reef Rentals. "Chef Kali treated us like family and curated a beautiful experience and exquisite meal. Facilitating remarkable experiences through food is not only her business, clearly it's her passion."

Plate to Plate offers a catalog of services including: private dinners, seafood boils, cooking demonstrations, tea and coffee tastings, table design, hor d'oeuvres for cocktail parties, brunch menus, wine tastings and pairings, cookie baking for kids (or grownups), as well as grocery stocking.

For more details please visit www.platetoplate.us, call (850) 974-2665 or follow @chefkali on Instagram.

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Kelli and Bart Precourt's Prema Organic Café Encourages Thriving and Surviving

by Christopher Manson

t's 10 a.m. on a Monday at the recently opened Prema Organic Café in Seagrove Beach, and Kelli Precourt—co-owner with husband Dr. Bart Precourt—is here, along with her small but dedicated staff, most of whom got to work around 5.

The restaurant's name comes from the Sanskrit for "to love", Precourt explains. "For us, it's about self-love: feeding yourself good food as an act of self-love."

Everything here is made in house and requires "a lot of loving hands," says Precourt. "My team is so amazing, and they walk the talk. They eat well; and the food they make, they know how important it is for it to be rooted in love."

Business has been great since Kelli and Bart opened next door to their Balance Health Studio. "Bart and I have been here for 15 years, offering clinical nutrition, cleanses, and menu design for people—that's teaching people how to eat healthy, creating a personal menu for the week," Kelli says. "For us, it was a natural progression, an end result from what we were doing.

"Our tribe over at Balance has put the word out (about Prema). We're 100 percent organic, 100 percent gluten-free. No one is doing that in this area. The standard and quality of food—the bar has been lifted big time. We are not willing to compromise. We believe people should nurture themselves with food."

She adds: "The biggest thing for me is that eating healthy can taste good. A lot of people are intimidated, and we try to make the food accessible to everyone."

Kelli and Bart came up with the Prema concept over years of eating healthy and compiling recipes they enjoy at home. Prema Organic Café offers "amazing" smoothie bowls, house made granola "not loaded with sugar", and "super-healthy" non-dairy yogurts, along with coldpressed juices made in house. "We don't denature the nutrients," Precourt says, emphasizing that none of the restaurant's recipes contain canola oil.



Kelli grew up in what she describes as a non-sugarbased home. "My parents never had cookies and cakes," she says. "My mom really taught me how to eat healthy. My husband and I educate the community about eating healthy and staying away from refined sugar. Anyone that knows Dr. Bart knows he's constantly educating his tribe about eating from God's garden—food that hasn't been manipulated.

"The day and age of the sickness that's going on in our country—I think a lot of people have woken up to the fact that health is the most important thing, staying healthy and strong, really thriving as a person. If you're paying attention to the news, the healthier you are, the more you can survive."

Kelli and Bart moved here about 15 years ago from Atlanta. Kelli was an Olympic field hockey player, so eating healthy was always a part of her lifestyle. "It was a requirement to perform well," she says. "If you ate crap, you performed like crap." We are not willing to compromise. We believe people should nurture themselves with food.

While Prema offers plenty of vegan and vegetarian options, there are also clean organic proteins for people who do eat meat. "I eat everything, and I'm very specific about animal proteins and where they come from," Precourt says.

"People love our organic cold-pressed juice, our nutrient-dense superfood smoothies. Our chicken salad is canola-free, and we make our own avocado oil mayonnaise. Everything we make from scratch. Our menu was designed to help people thrive. 'Let food be thy medicine.'"

Even Kelli's guilty pleasures stay within the semi-healthy realm. "If I'm going to have pizza, it'll be cauliflower crust. For

me, feeling better is way more important than the taste," she says. "Most food that you consider naughty can still be made healthier and not loaded with chemicals and gums and flours."

Lisa, one of Prema's regulars, stops in. "I come in here just about every day. I like the convenience of being able to drop in and grab something healthy," she beams. "What you get with Bart and Kelli is pure—so much love and warmth and integrity here. They're always trying to help people evolve—the community and people visiting from out of state. This is the place to be."

Prema Organic Cafe is open daily from 7:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. and is located at 3557 County Highway 30-A, Seagrove Beach, Florida. Visit their website at www. prema30a.com



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Paradis, Found How One Local Restaurant Stands the Test of Time

BY DENISE K. JAMES

The menu concept of Paradis is "local and coastal", in the words of Cosenzi, and the offerings consist of a variety of mouth-watering land and sea favorites for the most discerning palates.

here's something special about going out to eat when you're on vacation – or, for that matter, when you're fortunate to live in a place that feels like vacation all the time. For locals and visitors who discover Restaurant Paradis, it's not hard to put the worries of "real life" away and enjoy a fine meal and a well-crafted cocktail, while taking in breathtaking views of Rosemary Beach. Owner Danny Cosenzi and his team purchased the restaurant more than six years ago, and they have taken care to maintain these beloved qualities, as well as introduce new concepts and garner new fans.

According to Cosenzi, his invaluable staff is the reason that the restaurant is what it is today. Referring to them as "a senior staff," he explains how many of them have been around since Paradis's beginning, making customers feel at home and helping things run smoothly.

"They really take care of the restaurant," he emphasizes. "For example, Donnie Sellers, who is now

referred to as 'The MVP', started out as a painter for a project at the restaurant and then asked us for a job. He took a job as a dishwasher—and now he does everything! The regulars who come into the restaurant know him better than they know me."

It's most certainly a family environment at Paradis. Besides Sellers, there are bartenders who've stood the test



conditions were safe, and Cosenzi says he "had a new appreciation for what is offered."

"When we opened back up on May 7, it was great for my wife and I to see everyone," he says. "At the time, we offered three new dishes to kick off spring—our snapper, chicken, and tuna entrees were updated — even though the menu was limited. It was nice to see everyone come back and help."

The menu concept of Paradis is "local and coastal", in the words of Cosenzi, and the offerings consist of a variety of mouth-watering land and sea favorites for the most discerning palates. The limited spring menu still listed many of the favorites that patrons have come to know and love: diver scallops with wild mushroom and sweet pea risotto; fresh grouper encrusted with lobster and pistou; Shisho dusted ahi tuna; the cast iron filet with black truffle demi-glace; and more. Cosenzi promises the full menu will be back soon.

Cocktails, meanwhile, are still as popular as ever inside the Paradis Lounge, and the iconic Agave Maria continues to steal hearts with its blend of reposado tequila, watermelon puree, fresh citrus, and jalapeno. Those who prefer vodka are sure to love the Ruby Red Sunset, made with Deep Eddy Ruby Red grapefruit vodka, fresh citrus, a splash of ginger ale, and a sugared rim. And, for bourbon drinkers, we suggest The French Quarter: Buffalo Trace Bourbon, green chartreuse, and orange bitters.

> Of course, the cocktail menu also offers a number of other libations, including martinis, wines, and dessert cordials.

> Cosenzi and the rest of the Paradis staff look forward to still being able to celebrate 11 years of excellent cuisine and are working on a rescheduled anniversary event. Until then, they are excited to greet visitors and share the love of the



of time—Jeff Troy, Byron Lewis, Lindsey Hedglin—as well as Chef Mark Eichin and General Manager Michael Wood, both on staff since day one. When the restaurant closed on March 20, due to COVID-19, it was just five days before the anniversary of being open for 11 years. Everyone was pleased to return to the restaurant once island over a fabulous meal.

"We've been very blessed during these tough times," Cosenzi comments with a smile.

To make a reservation or see the menus online, please visit www.restaurantparadis.com, or call (850) 534-0400.



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Cowgirl Hospitality Group's Southern Belle Catering Service Brings Gourmet to Your Home

n 2005, Texas-born Nikki Nickerson shared her pioneer spirit and knowledge of fine food when she opened Cowgirl Kitchen in beautiful Rosemary Beach, Fla. The concept was simple: fresh, delicious food in a casual setting with quick, friendly service for an easy place to mingle with friends or to get great food to go.

Today, that concept has grown from that one restaurant to Cowgirl Hospitality Group, which includes three restaurants, a boutique retail store, and Southern Belle Catering Company, all along 30-A. And all of these ventures focus on that initial concept, which is providing their guests with casual and fun experiences while serving delicious food with an inviting and hospitable staff. "Our places focus on fun, affordable and delicious food," Nickerson says. "Our catering company focuses on delivering a casual delicious experience in their home."

Responding to the extraordinary challenges of serving food safely in 2020, Southern Belle Catering has kicked it into high gear, bringing the community safe, convenient, and delicious meal options perfect for small dinner get-togethers, outdoor breakfasts on the beach, and everything in between. Chef Catheryne Heppler has created menus that make your mouth water just reading them. "We have really continued to focus on that initial concept of simplicity and fresh ingredients while responding to the needs of our customers and changing the menu to meet those needs,"

says Heppler. "Our customers have come to expect the flawless, easy experience, delicious food and great service and we continue to provide that."

Chef Heppler joined forces with Southern Belle Catering as catering director in 2019 after moving to 30-A with her husband Rob, following their yearning to call Santa Rosa Beach home. Previously, Heppler was a chef out of Michigan, where she won numerous awards with Taste of America and competed in the World Food Championships in Dallas. Chef Heppler has really found her niche with Southern Belle Catering. "I work with some of the most wonderful people and get to really create experiences for them that change the way they feel about food, while taking the stress out of their events whether that's a small family dinner or a large corporate lunch," says Heppler. by Wendy O. Dixon



Southern Belle Catering has kicked it into high gear, bringing the community safe, convenient, and delicious meal options perfect for small dinner get-togethers, outdoor breakfasts on the beach, and everything in between. Heppler and Nickerson continue to work closely together, offering favorites on the menu like sage biscuits, Southern barbecue family dinners, taco bars, shrimp boils, charcuterie boards and more. They are continually inspired by the incredible area of Northwest Florida, and especially the 30-A community, the food of the gulf, and the people who surround it.

The Southern Belle Catering menu includes breakfast, lunch, dinner, cocktail parties, wine dinners, and taco bar options, as well as grazing boards, desserts and beverages. One can easily place an order 72 hours in advance and pick it up at the nearest Cowgirl Hospitality Group location. Meals are packaged in disposable containers and ready to go. The catering service has a low per person requirement of just 10 people, so even small gatherings can feel special and easy.

Consider Southern Belle Catering to cater your festivities. Thanksgiving meals have been one of the most popular catering events for Southern Belle Catering, now going on 15 years. With a la carte offerings from smoked turkeys, traditional and modernday sides and vegetables and all the fixings, there's something that will please every taste. According to Nickerson, "It is by far our biggest production of the year, and we take the holiday seriously, we want families and friends feeling 'wowed' for their holiday. I may be biased, but it is the easiest and most delicious way to do Thanksgiving at the beach."

About Cowgirl Hospitality Group

Cowgirl Hospitality Group offers three restaurant experiences along 30-A; Blue Mabel Restaurant and Bar, Cowgirl Kitchen Restaurant and Bar, and Cowgirl Kitchen Market, along with boutique retail store CK Feed & Supply, and catering through Southern Belle Catering Company. All focus on a casual and fun experiences while serving delicious food with an inviting and hospitable staff. Nikki Nickerson was recognized in 2019 as a James Beard Fellow for outstanding entrepreneurship with her culinary leadership and has been a restaurant operator in South Walton, Fla., since 2005.

Southern Belle Catering; southernbellecatering.co; catering@cowgirlkitchen.com

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A Southern Staple in Seaside The Great Southern Café

by Tess Farmer



mainstay on Central Square for nearly 15 years, the Great Southern Café is now a part of the Seaside tradition. The coastal casual restaurant fuses Southern cooking with flavors from around the world, and features local produce, meat, and dairy from nearby farms and fresh seafood from the Gulf of Mexico.

"We pride ourselves on our connection to the local community and strive to be a cornerstone of support and reliability to our people. It's the foundation of our company's mission," says owner and Chef Jim Shirley.

In the mid-90s, Shirley opened his first restaurant in Pensacola: Madison's Diner (named after his daughter Madison). This was followed by the Screaming Coyote and The Fish House in 1998. Following these successes, he launched the Great Southern Café in 2006.

Sunday brunch is a tradition on 30-A, and at Great Southern Café it's met with beignets and coffee, crowdpleasing Bloody Marys, and a fried green tomato benedict, to name a few customer favorites. Be sure to top your classic breakfast off with Big Jim's World Famous Oyster Juice in the tequila bottles on each table. Shirley's signature dish, Grits à Ya Ya, is a customer favorite and celebrated around the nation. The dish was named "best Southern dish in the state of Florida" by Florida Travel and Life magazine. It was also chosen by U.S. Congressman Jeff Miller (former Florida state representative) to take to Washington, D.C. for A Taste of the South, an event held on Capitol Hill for over 1000 dignitaries.

Shirley and his team incorporate Southern accents into new culinary ideas and trends, select fine wines, and seek out partnerships with local farmers to supply fresh produce, meats and dairy. As a Pensacola native, Chef Shirley applies his knowledge of local waters and his family's farming histories to promote sustainable agriculture and fishing.

His style of cooking is one he calls modern southern cuisine. As the son of a Navy pilot who was stationed all around the world, Shirley learned to enjoy a variety of foods from many cultures. But he always goes back to his roots—his grandmother's traditional Southern cooking.

"I believe our histories are told by the food we cook and eat and Great Southern tells the story of my history,



of the great food and people I've met along the road," says Shirley. "Here in Seaside, we mix a taste for international cuisines with Southern cooking and sustainably-sourced, local food."

Even the building has a storied history. Legend has it that around 1988, several houses in nearby Chattahoochee, Florida were to be practically given away to make room for a road project. A young couple had become enchanted with Seaside and wanted to live there. In an effort to forego architects and builders they set out to convince town founders, Robert and Daryl Rose Davis, to allow them to move one of the Chattahoochee houses to a lot on East Ruskin Street.

Not too long after Seaside was becoming known and upon learning the house on East Ruskin Street was for sale, the Davises bought the small cottage from the couple and moved it to Central Square. They knew some food options and a few wine selections would be a hit; and once again the little house was on the move and opened as The Rose Cafe. Down the road years later, Shirley bought the restaurant and it became the Great Southern Café in 2006, paying homage ever since to the building's rich history, and reflecting a menu that is truly Southern in every way.

For details on hours of operation and to view a menu, visit thegreatsoutherncafe.com. Attached to the Great Southern Cafe, B.f.f. specializes in boozy bushwackers, frosé and frozen beverages. Chef Shirley's family of restaurants also includes other local favorites: Meltdown on 30A, 45 Central Wine and Sushi Bar, The Bay, and Farm & Fire Southern Pizzeria.



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chef profiles

Chef Nikhil Abuvala of Roux 30A

chef profile

Chef Drew of Alys Beach

by Andy Butcher

But for some limp lettuce, Drew Dzejak might not have pursued a life in the kitchen. While working towards his degree in culinary arts and food service management at Johnson & Wales University in Charleston, South Carolina, he had gigs as a banquet captain by night and cook by day. With a forthcoming marriage, he took a better-paying front-of-house job thinking that might be the wiser career choice.

Three months in, he was carrying salads to a VIP dinner when he looked down and decided he just couldn't serve them the way they looked: all wilted. "I re-plated them all," he recalls. "I couldn't walk into the room with them the way they were."

That moment pivoted Dzejak back to the kitchen, taking a pay cut as a breakfast cook at the five-star Woodlands Inn in Somerville, South Carolina, for the chance to work under celebrated executive chef Ken Vedrinski. "He was a genius when it comes to food," Dzejak says. "He was flexible; not a bythe-book type. I remember one night we changed the menu during dinner service, because he didn't like the way it was coming out."

Those two formative experiences—the impact of appearance and the importance of

adaptability—have been his drivers since becoming Executive Chef for Alys Beach four years ago. In this role he oversees a wide range of operations that defy a cookiecutter approach: Instagram-worthy poolside dining at the flagship Caliza restaurant, stylish nibbles at Neat, and simple grab-and-go from Piper's Kitchen (run by his wife, Stephanie). And coming soon: the restaurant at the new homeowner-exclusive Beach Club at Alys Beach, opening on the beach side of 30-A.

In addition to offering a new culinary challenge, coming to Alys Beach has reunited Dzejak with former colleagues and brought him back closer to his roots: he grew up in Kissimmee, getting a first love for cooking from helping his grandmother. Another bonus is being even closer to the beach for his children: Aurora and John.

Given that a good meal engages all the senses, it's no wonder that a creative chef like Dzejak pays attention to both palate and palette. Caliza's al fresco setting means serving romaine ("It's hardier; stands up a little longer") rather than softer butter and red oak lettuces ("They



don't last long") in the summer; while in the winter, plates are presented more tightly to retain the heat.

That's not the only seasonality to take into account. Dzejak has also learned to tweak the offerings depending on who's in town for spring break: homeowners and guests alike. Texas week perhaps expectedly means an additional meat for Lone Star State visitors, while Nashville's arrivals crave extra fish ("They're a little more landlocked, and they want to try seafood.").

Ask him about a signature dish and he demurs in the down-to-earth manner that characterizes his fluid approach to an up-market clientele. "It's all about what the diners want," he says. "I might have a favorite, but if it's the bottom seller, then I am sorry, it has to go." There are two perennial Caliza diner favorites, however: octopus and, surprisingly on hot summer evenings, soup: corn, asparagus, and pea. ("It's just one of those things you don't make at home," is how he explains the appeal.)

With female diners outnumbering the men, Caliza's menu emphasizes light ("No heavy marinades, no heavy sauces"), and shareable. Appetizers like jumbo lump crab In this role he oversees a wide range of operations that defy a cookie-cutter approach: Instagramworthy poolside dining at the flagship Caliza restaurant, stylish nibbles at Neat, and simple grab-andgo from Piper's Kitchen.

wrap and burrata toast are popular, along with entrees such as grilled tuna escabeche, seared scallop, and crispy skin snapper. Slow-cook desserts trend to the shareable too: banana bread pudding, key lime pie, buttermilk cheesecake, chocolate mousse.

Overall, Dzejak acknowledges a Mediterranean shade to the menu, fitting with the strikingly bluewatered and white-walled environment, though he notes that doesn't simply mean Greek. "The Mediterranean touches France, Spain, and Italy," he points out, allowing for lots of variations on a theme. "Egypt touches the Mediterranean, and Turkey, with the spice road. It's all the Mediterranean." An additional flavor twist is brought by the Peruvian influence of Caliza's chef Renato Falconi.

Naturally, in keeping with Caliza's outdoor allure, there is an emphasis on fresh. Except for the Spanish octopus, seafood is "probably right from the Gulf you've just been looking at," while vegetables are sourced from a farming collective in Louisiana. And sometimes, in a pinch when one is needed, some basil from Drew's own home garden.

Caliza Restaurant is located at 23 Nonesuch Way, Alys Beach, Florida 32461 Hours: Tuesday-Saturday, 5:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. Go to www.calizarestaurant.com or call (850) 213-5700.

chef profile

Chef Kyle Swift by Courtney Murray

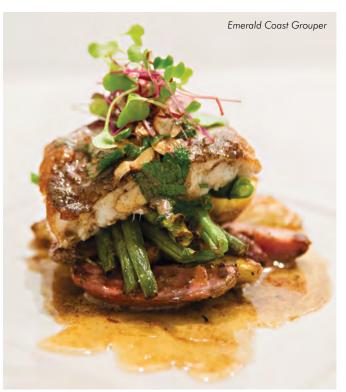
Some people like their job. Some people are passionate about what they do. For Chef Kyle Swift, cooking runs deep within his veins. "If I had to pin-point my single greatest passion for cooking it would be feeding people. The whole process and journey that food and culinary products take to reach the end consumer is amazing," describes Swift. "Being the last person to assemble those items for someone to consume is fulfilling. Having a person or group of people there to enjoy something I've created brings me joy."

His love of the culinary arts goes all the way back to childhood. They didn't have any chefs in the family, but his mother cooked delicious healthy meals for them every day. It wasn't anything elaborate, but it was comforting and taught him the foundations for basic cooking techniques that would set him up for life. By 6-7 years old he was scrambling eggs and fully immersing himself into learning the process of cooking. While most 8-12 years old boys are watching *Ninja Turtles* and *Spiderman*, Swift was watching *Emeril* and other cooking shows.

His first few restaurant jobs were washing dishes at a buffet restaurant and working in fast food; learning every position in the kitchen. After moving back to Florida, Swift continued to expand his knowledge by gaining experience working in numerous restaurants from Destin to Rosemary Beach. He made the switch to food sales and worked at many beloved establishments along the Emerald Coast, including Christiano's and Summer Kitchen.

After multiple requests from friends, family, and prior customers to come cook for their events or prepare a meal in their home he began making meals in December 2014. By spring 2015 Swiftly Catered was born. The focus was primarily on Four Course Casual Fine Dining: a delightful combination of French, Gulf Coast, Central American, Asian, Creole, and the flavors that people travel to 30-A to enjoy. "We strived to make everything as 'swift' as possible. From booking to our cooking process in their homes. We basically set up a casual fine dining restaurant for a few hours in our guest's home or rental property," he says. Swiftly Catered has doubled their sales each year since 2015 and now offers private chef services and all culinary needs stretching from Panama City Beach to Destin.

Swift and Dallin Harris crossed paths in 2015 when Dallin and his wife Jessie moved here from Utah to begin spreading the Barbacoa Mexican Grill franchise in Inlet Beach, FL. Swift became Harris's primary vendor as his US Foods Sales Rep and the pair quickly became great friends. Harris began helping with catering events and when he got an offer from a buyer to purchase his



We basically set up a casual fine dining restaurant for a few hours in our guest's home or rental property.

restaurant Harris took it, and then decided to buy into Swiftly Catered.

The duo planned to build a catering kitchen in the unique Blue Mountain Beach area. In the process of designing and discussing kitchen ideas, the sale of La Lobas Bakery fell into their laps. The history of the bakery goes back 25 years, and with 13 years in this location came great products, employees, and an established customer base. Swift and Harris are now in the process of rebranding to Blue Mountain Bakery. By keeping the La Lobas brand on their granola and featuring the stories of the three owners the bakery has had, they will pay homage to its roots. Plans include a kitchen/dining room/patio expansion, as well as a dinner and dessert menu, opening on Sundays in season, and delivery options.



Chocolate Key Lime Pie

One of the most exciting plans is to become one of the first 100% organic bakeries and cafes on the Panhandle. Swift is an avid fisherman and is able to catch and prepare fresh seafood right from our local bays and the Gulf of Mexico.

Swift's advice to a novice chef would be practice. Practice. Practice. "Cooking is all about repetition, once you get an item or dish figured out, set yourself up the same way each time to prepare it again," says Swift. Repetition has certainly paid off for him. Swiftly Catered & Blue Mountain Bakery look forward to continuing to feed our community and those that come here to enjoy our beautiful beaches.

For additional information visit www.swiftlycatered. com or call (850) 972-0850. Go check out Blue Mountain Bakery Monday-Saturday: 7 a.m. - 3 p.m. at 2217 W County Hwy 30A, Santa Rosa Beach, FL 32459. For more information call (850) 267-0400 or visit www.bluemountainbakery.com.



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chef profile

Chef Williams of Café Thirty-A

by Liesel Schmidt

Influenced by his world travels, the new items focus on Mediterranean style cuisine with an Island twist, showing Williams's flair for international cooking and his deep understanding of unique flavor profiles.

or some, the draw of the kitchen is undeniable, giving them a visceral sense that they belong on the line: getting intimate with a knife and taming the flames under their pans to create something that feeds the body and touches the soul. They see, feel, touch, taste, and smell things others don't, visualizing what a dish will look like and knowing just what ingredients to use in order to make flavors sing. It was that kind of instinct that has taken Chef Tim Williams far in his career—35 years of manning the stoves and directing a team that is carrying out his vision. And while he might not have ever imagined achieving great success when he got his first food service job as a sandwich maker back in 1982, Williams has since proved that he can impress even the most discriminating palates with his food.

His Aha moment came in 1984. "When I was working in a 65-seat restaurant owned by a young couple who were both CIA graduates and saw their intense attention to detail and their willingness to train me, I knew I had found my calling," Williams says, recalling his first job in a real restaurant. And though he could have put his plans to become a chef on hold while he attended culinary school, Williams dove into cooking without a net, getting hands-on training in the kitchens of restaurants in Cape Cod, Colorado, Florida, and New York.

For seven years, he learned at the hands of masters, then enrolled in the Culinary Institute of America in



Hyde Park, New York, in 1991. The next 27 years took him to renowned restaurants across the country, notably claiming the title of executive chef for a restaurant group in Atlanta before becoming their corporate chef. Later, he joined the team at Dantanna's for their opening in 2003, bringing his technique and attention to detail to the restaurant and making it an Atlanta hotspot.

With such experience in his repertoire, it's little wonder that, when Café Thirty-A was looking for a new chef in the summer of 2018, Williams got the job. "A mutual friend of mine and the restaurant's gave them a copy of my resume," he says of how his name was put in the running for the open position. And while his impressive history could easily have gotten the job, it was the man behind the resume who sealed the deal. "After a 90 minute conversation with Harriet Crommelin, the owner, and David Kessler, the General Manager, I knew that we were all of the same mindset. It was obvious to me that we would all work really well together."

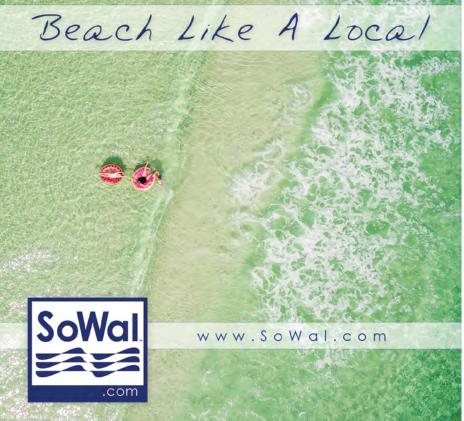
Since July of 2018, Williams has been proving just that, taking possession of the kitchen in the perennially popular restaurant and continuing their tradition of serving fantastic food, adding a few new dishes of his own to the menu while maintaining the classics for which they have become so well known. Influenced by his world travels, the new items focus on Mediterranean style cuisine with an Island twist, showing Williams's flair for international cooking and his deep understanding of unique flavor profiles. "My goal in working at Café Thirty-A has always been to continue offering the highest quality dining experience in the area," says Williams.

Part of that dining experience is a new dish to the menu, Tadoori Marinated Salmon, which he created while he was working in Atlanta and has been always been a guest favorite, wherever it is served. As his creation, it stands to reason that the dish is also one of his favorite things to cook—and it's also beautiful to look at. Perfectly seared salmon coated in a Tandoori spice rub atop a bed of Jasmine rice and accompanied by snow peas, cucumber sunomono, and honey raita, the plate is a colorful array of flavors that somehow harmonize the cuisine of Japan and India.

Having owned a home in Panama City Beach since 2016, Williams was already in love with the area when he made the permanent move in 2018. Since then, his passion for the area has only increased—and it's fed into his work. "We are thrilled to have Chef Tim as part of the Cafe Thirty-A family," says owner Harriet Crommelin. "His talents are undeniable, and we look forward to many years working with him." Adds Williams, "I enjoy the fact that every night and every shift brings its own set of challenges. I really enjoy seeing the team work together as a well-oiled machine."

Café Thirty-A is located at 3899 East Scenic Hwy. 30A, Seagrove Beach, FL 32459. Open daily at 4:30 p.m. For more information, call (850) 231-2166 or visit www.cafethirtya.com.





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The Race is On Seaside School Half Marathon and 5K

hat feeling of the earth beneath your feet and fresh air inside your lungs must be why runners

fresh air inside your lungs must be why runners love their sport. And for the last two decades, another great feeling has graced runners and walkers in the town of Seaside: the knowledge they're supporting a worthy cause and local, innovative education options during the Seaside School Half Marathon and 5K.

This year, the Seaside Half Marathon and 5K will look a little different in the era of COVID-19. The all-virtual event promises to be just as spirited and transformative for Seaside Neighborhood School, grades 5 through 8, and Seaside Collegiate School, grades 9 through 12. (Seaside Collegiate—which leases space from Northwest Florida State College—is where Seaside students can experience their first taste of postsecondary education.)

"They're receiving their high school diploma plus an associate's degree," notes Teresa Horton, executive director of the Seaside School Foundation. "Students and families don't pay any tuition fees. The collegiate program is for high school students who desire to undertake college level courses and earn their high school diploma and associate degree. It's ideal for students who want to get ahead and crave a nontraditional high school experience."

As a public, nonprofit charter organization, Seaside School depends on funds raised through the race and the accompanying "Taste of the Race" local food festival, which raises money specifically for the expanding Seaside Neighborhood School Culinary Garden program. Through this program, students have the opportunity to gain knowledge about food and healthy habits in a neighborhood garden.

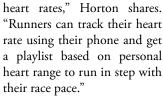
"The race and Taste of the Race food festival are so important—we count on the events every year to support the operations of the school and provide exceptional learning opportunities for our students," remarks Horton. She adds that the race is only five years younger than the school itself—2001 and 1996, respectively.

"Going virtual this year was not the easiest decision for us," she admits. "But it's the safest possible way to have the event. And the safety and security of families and kids matters most. It's tough to know that we aren't gathering in person. However, safety guided our decision. And when we come back in 2022, we will celebrate 20 years of the race even longer!"

The 2021 virtual race is coming with its own set of perks and things for runners to look forward to. For one

BY DENISE K. JAMES





Embarrassed about your running skills? No worries you can work virtually with one of 11 lululemon of Grayton Beach ambassador coaches in the weeks leading up to the race. "The goal is to have coaches based on different levels of runner abilities and on their personal goals," Horton notes.

Foodies might be wondering how Taste of the Race, one of the most anticipated parts



thing, a handy app called RaceJoy will track how fast

runners and walkers are moving in real time, as well as

give friends and family the opportunity to watch, track,

and cheer virtually. Runners and walkers can complete

the race any time between February 14 and 28, adding a

level of convenience to the event. Renowned designer

Vera Bradley has been a sponsor of the race for years, and

each participant gets a face mask and a backpack

featuring one of her distinct designs, as well as a colorful,

custom t-shirt designed by Seaside art teacher Billie

Graffey. Perhaps best of all, customized music playlists

music students who are working on playlists based on

"One of the coolest components is a group of the

are part of the plan.

of the event, will take place in our socially distanced era. Fortunately, an entire restaurant week, featuring

a number of delicious establishments, will ensure everyone is able to indulge and support the cause. The Taste of the Race Restaurant Weeks will run in tandem with the race itself, from January 31 to February 14.

"Restaurants will give a certain percentage back and have special dishes, drinks, and menu items featured," Horton says. "We are also planning to have special VIP donor dinners during the weekend of Feb 26 to 28. These dinners will be higher ticket items for a nice meal and good wine. And it's all going back to support the Seaside School."

To learn more, visit www.runseasidefl.com.



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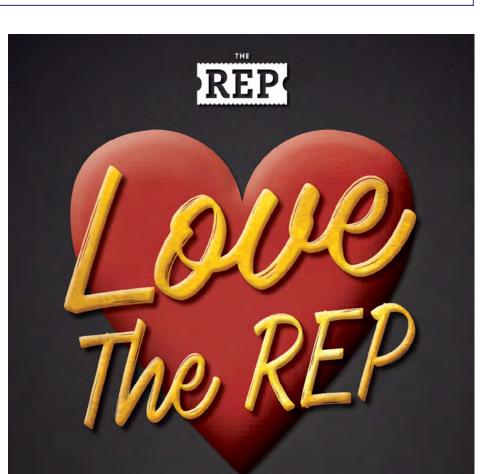
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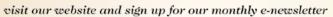
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