

UP FOR SOME CONVERSATION?

Food writer Sue Ade would love to drop by for a little table talk. Reach her at 683-0375 or sueade@aol.com

I started cooking breakfast in an all-night breakfast place, and when I turned 18, I started waiting tables. When I was 21, I bartended at hotels and did that all through college.

When did you come to Hilton Head Island? What kind of work did you do when you got here?

When I first moved to the island I managed the comedy club Coconuts. Before opening Street Meet, I had a great job running the Harbourside Café, in Sea Pines, for 12 years, as the general manager. My last day there was when the sale went through for Street Meet, in July of last year.

Why did you pursue a degree in journalism rather than, perhaps, attending culinary school?

Back home, I used to do editorial and political cartooning and I thought that I might like to write or become an artist. But I always loved working in restaurants, especially the creative part of it. I thought having a degree in a separate field would make me better rounded.

Was your family supportive of your opening a restaurant?

My wife Shelby was very supportive. We've known one another for almost 12 years, and she's always known that the next step for me was to open my own restaurant.

When I was working on the concept last summer, I had no less than 10 great people helping me with everything from the menu to the antiques in the restaurant to the kind of glasses that people drank from in the 1930s.

"We wanted to make homemade versions of everyone's favorite foods from their hometown. Serve them with a nice glass of wine or cocktail that you can't get at your local drive through and create an atmosphere full of nostalgia when the times nor the food were quite so fast."

Carey Basciano, chef/owner

Is the 1930s part of your concept?

Yes, but first we wanted to create a menu that fused regional American street food. When I was at the Harbourside, people from all over the United States would be telling us that their hometown had the best hamburgers, or the best hot dogs.

While I realized that perhaps a person's favorite food would not be authentic unless it came from their hometown, I didn't want it to stop us from recreating regional recipes and making a homemade version of our own.

So we took foods from all over the United States and mixed and matched the recipes. For instance, on the menu, we have a crab pretzel (a baked soft pretzel with a scoop of homemade crab dip and shrimp dip) and even though we're not trying to do Buffalo wings, we do Buffalo Pierogies, sautéed in wing sauce and blue cheese.

We do a homemade horseradish sauce for our onion rings. We make our own seasoned hamburger mix and our hot dogs are flown in from Syracuse.

My executive chef, Rafael (Palacios) and I cook together six nights a week.

Rafael, how did you happen to come to Hilton Head Island (from Mexico City)?

(Executive Chef Rafael Palacios) My brother worked in the kitchen for La Mesa Restaurant, in Dallas, Texas. When the owners of La Mesa opened a restaurant on Hilton Head (at the mall, in 1989), they sent my brother here to work, and then I came to work with my brother.

Do you have family?

Yes, my wife Solya and I have two children, a son and a daughter. Solya works here, too.

So, you've been cooking on Hilton Head since 1989?

I have worked at Brian's (where Frankie Bones is now located), Café Europa (as a line cook), and I was the executive chef at Land's End for five years.

How did the two of you meet?

(Basciano) Actually I knew Rafael from years ago, when I was at Harbour Town, and he was still at Café Europa. When I was looking for a chef for Street Meet, a

STREET MEET AMERICAN TAKE OUT & TAVERN

Where: 95 Mathews Drive, Port Royal Plaza, corner of U.S. 278 and Mathews Drive, Hilton Head Island
Hours: Daily continuous service, 11 a.m. to midnight; happy hour, 3 to 6 p.m.

On the menu: "Sidewalk sandwiches from America's street corners"; a dinner menu featuring seafood, chicken, meat and pasta specialties; late-night menu; takeout and family packs to go

Prices: Inexpensive

Bring the kids? Yes, children's menu available

What to wear? Come as you are

Call: 842-2570

lot with a limited space. (The restaurant encompasses two adjoining areas, a "street" and a "tavern.")

(Basciano) You can't street vend on Hilton Head so we created a "street" here (at the front entrance) and then you walk into the "tavern." I am kind of a history buff.

I wanted to create an environment reminiscent of a turn-of-the-century tavern, post-Prohibition (Prohibition ended in 1933).

The family neighborhood tavern was the restaurant of the middle class. There were no Applebee's, there were no chains.

When I was a little kid growing up, we'd go down to the tavern on Friday nights where there was an old-time bartender behind the bar, with his sleeves rolled up.

There was no swearing at the bar, there was no smoking. Families ate there and the kids got bubble gum when they left.

You really fell in love with the genre?

Yes. I loved that place and the comfort of going there with my family. It didn't have the negative connotation of a bar. At Street Meet the food is the focus first, the bar second.

Family is very important to you, isn't it?

That's a big part of it. The children get crayons and short-order cooks' hats to draw on when they come here.

When the guest check comes, the kids (and everybody else) get bubble gum and everyone just loves it.

food rep let me know that Rafael was available.

What do you like to cook?

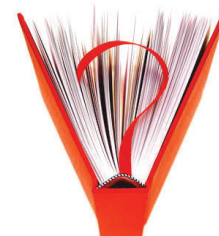
(Palacios) I like to do everything. We do catering here, too, and I was used to doing catering from my other jobs.

(Basciano) For the past eight years, Rafael has worked in big seafood restaurants, so we are ordering fresh seafood that Rafael is preparing. His seafood dishes are exceptional, and it comes out in a fun presentation.

Tell me about Street Meet's unique décor? You've done a

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