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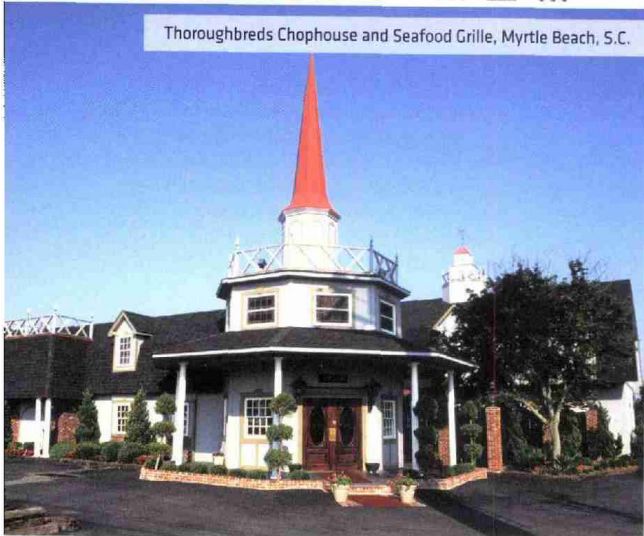


Union Provisions, Charleston, S.C.

QUITE THE Catch

Foodie finds of the Carolina coast satisfy the gourmet in every group

BY JEFF HEILMAN



Thoroughbreds Chophouse and Seafood Grille, Myrtle Beach, S.C.

Call it a recipe for success of historic proportions. From their coastal waters and rivers, North Carolina and South Carolina yield some of the world's finest fruits of the sea. The land, marsh and forest harvest of rice, okra, peanuts, wild game and other time-honored produce is no less bountiful, practically singing on the plate in their original Gullah/Geechee, Cajun, Caribbean, Creole and other accents. Put it all together and you have the unmistakable cuisine of the Lowcountry, irresistibly alluring for groups looking to flavor their Carolinas meeting experience with a menu centuries in the making.

From fine dining to festivals, including the 30th anniversary this March of the Hilton Head Wine + Food Festival, here are seven top choices for, as the saying goes, "putting some South in yo' mouth."

NORTH CAROLINA THE HARVEY MANSION HISTORIC INN AND RESTAURANT, NEW BERN

www.theharveymansion.com

Birthplace of Pepsi and North Carolina's colonial capital, New Bern combines 300 years of history with its 45,000-square-foot Riverfront Convention Center and dining options such as this treasure in the downtown historic district.

Built between 1797 and 1804 as the home of English ship owner and merchant John Harvey, the mansion's past lives include use as a Civil War military headquarters and school. Among the oldest surviving buildings in New Bern, the evocative three-story mansion was restored and reopened in February 2003 as a restaurant and offers three guest rooms on the top floor.

Ideal for meetings and social events, the restaurant offers six dining rooms accommodating from 10 to 26 guests, with buyouts available for up to 100. Wide-plank floors and 1800s wainscoting enhance the allure, and the 1797 Steamer Bar in the basement is great for convivial mixers.



Wilmington [N.C.] Convention Center, Savor...Catering

BASNIGHT'S LONE CEDAR CAFE, NAG'S HEAD

www.lonecedarcafe.com

From the seafood caught by local fisherman and delivered straight to its docks to the herbs and greens grown in its on-site garden, this family-owned local treasure puts fresh first on its seafood-driven menu. Specializing in fish, clams, crab, shrimp and oysters from local waters, along with all-natural beef and poultry, the spacious restaurant offers three dining rooms, all with stunning views of the Roanoke Sound.

With two of the rooms available for private functions, Executive Chef Bud Gruninger, a Culinary Institute of America (CIA) graduate, and his team of fellow CIA- and Johnson & Wales-trained professionals are skilled at creating customized menus for groups. The restaurant also caters off-site events, from small parties to major gatherings.

BEAUFORT GROCERY COMPANY, BEAUFORT

www.beaufortgrocery.com

Located in the historic district of tight-knit Beaufort on North Carolina's bountiful Crystal Coast, this charming restaurant is where husband-and-wife co-owners Charles and Wendy Park combine their passion for cooking, community and people to deliver the definitive local dining experience.

From starters like Carolina crab dip to meat and seafood entrees to the pecan pie and other desserts, it's wholesome and highly satisfying all the way. Groups can gather at the restaurant's adjacent event space, or have their gathering catered with a full range of planning services.

Filled with family and restaurant recipes, the Park's 128-page cookbook, *Closed on Tuesdays*, makes a great gift to entice friends, clients and other groups to the region.

SAVOR...WILMINGTON CATERING, WILMINGTON

www.businessmadecasual.com

The menu reads like a fine dining temple, with tantalizing dishes such as the lobster strudel topped with a Champagne cream sauce, filled with shiitake mushrooms and caramelized leeks, or the ginger crab cakes with Grey Goose vodka aioli, served with a roasted corn and pepper medley over North Carolina purple sweet potato straws.

Hold onto your fork, though, for this is just a sampling of the delicious cuisine awaiting delegates at the 107,000-square-foot, LEED Silver-certified Wilmington Convention Center, created by the award-winning culinary team behind Savor's full in-house catering

ZOOM iN

Q&A with William Canny,
Executive Chef, Cafe Pamlico at
The Inn on Pamlico Sound (www.innonpamlicosound.com), Buxton
(Hatteras Island), N.C.



What brought you to the Outer Banks as a chef?

I came to Hatteras Island on a surf trip six years ago and fell in love with beach life. It's so different from working in my home town of Verbier, a ski resort in Switzerland. All of those I met on my first trip to Hatteras were warm, welcoming, artistic people. On a later trip, a fellow surfer and a Craigslist posting provided an entree to the management team at The Inn on Pamlico Sound and its restaurant, Cafe Pamlico. The chemistry was great, and led to several successful months as a guest chef in 2012. In early 2014, Steve Nelson, the inn's CEO and general manager, and Julia Parker, general manager, culinary and event services for Cafe Pamlico, asked me back to

lead the culinary team as executive chef.

What makes the Outer Banks an appealing culinary destination for groups?

Ingredient quality is a huge factor in making the Outer Banks an exceptional culinary destination. Between ocean and sound, variety and freshness of fish is unsurpassed. Complementing such fresh catches with produce from our gardens, local farms and resources from specialty purveyors is a delight to any chef with a core belief that great food begins with the best ingredients. The Southern influences here contribute to the complete gastronomical experience.

What are some of key ingredients and traditions

of the North Carolina/Outer Banks menu, and how have you incorporated these into your cuisine?

I've helped make shrimp and crab central to our menu. Our shrimp and grits has become a signature dish, and has contributed Southern Creole influences to my personal style. Creole and Lowcountry influences help me use a bit more spice than would be the norm back in Europe.

What can guests expect from their dining experience at Cafe Pamlico?

Guests can expect an enchanted evening with superb waterfront views of the sunset, exceptional service, welcoming staff and a meal that will blow their socks off!

service.

Supporting local farms and featuring sustainable seafood as part of each tailored menu, the Savor team also specializes in gluten-free, vegetarian, low-fat and low-carb options, accommodating such requests while keeping event costs down.

SOUTH CAROLINA UNION PROVISIONS, CHARLESTON

www.unionprovisions.com

At this American Brasserie-style concept opened last summer in downtown Charleston, co-owner Ben Russell-Schlesinger, originally from San Francisco, melds West Coast influences with classic Lowcountry ingredients for a tasty seasonal menu mixing small sharing plates and entrees.

Standout starters include grilled shrimp flatbread, while the shrimp and chive dumplings with soy-ginger sauce make for a flavorful "steamer basket," and the main course Cioppino—local clams, shrimp, white fish and scallops in a tomato-chorizo sauce—is divine.

Housed in a meticulously restored 114-year-old building, the restaurant com-

bines original elements with expansive floor-to-ceiling windows and classic Brasserie tiles. Buyouts are available for 120 people, with a side porch accommodating small groups.

DYE'S GULLAH FIXIN'S, HILTON HEAD ISLAND

www.dyesgullahfixins.com

Known variously as "Gullah Gullah," "Geechee" and "Gullah/Geechee," Gullah cuisine, also synonymous with Lowcountry cooking, is where the coastal Carolina menu began. Introduced by West African slaves working on coastal rice plantations, Gullah is a living history book of ingredients and influences, incorporating staples such as rice, seafood, chicken, pork, onions and peppers.

As true a Gullah guardian as they come is Dye Scott-Rhodan, who along with her family, perpetuates the Gullah and Sea Island cooking tradition at her rave-reviewed restaurant. Reservations are required and the hours are limited, but catering is available for events, allowing groups to enjoy made-from-scratch classics such as smothered shrimp and grits, Hoppin' John and sweet potato pie.