

# The Way We Ate...

Distant memories of the meals we left behind

by Chelle Koster Walton

**R**emember Gilligan's, Loco's, Bellini's, Tarwinkles, Jean Paul's, and Harbor House? How about Hickory BBQ, McCully's, Dario's, Smitty's, or Zoe's? That's where we ate back when *Times of the Islands* first dished up scrutiny of the distinctive style of living we enjoy in and around the islands.

Today these restaurants have turned their tables, so to speak, morphing into newer favorites. Others have remained constant on our culinary landscape: McT's Shrimp House,



The Veranda, Bistro 41, Timbers, Lighthouse Café, Prawnbroker, Jacaranda, Twilight Café, Rode's, and Snug Harbor, to name a few. New favorites have arisen: Dolce Vita, Sanibel Steakhouse, Cru, Keylime Bistro, Cin Cin, Warfield's, and many more.

The old and the new demonstrate how our tastes have changed and how central to our lives food and dining have remained. In a recent *Times of the*



*Islands* Reader Profile survey, 99 percent of our respondents rated “restaurants” among their top activity choices—the greatest percentage of all activities listed. The majority of respondents indicated that they eat out several times a month.

Through the years, *Times of the Islands* has managed to meet its readers’



**David Grant has graced our pages with his wit and knowledge of cuisine.**

hunger with ever-generous servings of verbal fare. Whereas in the earliest issues food received a cursory round-up of short restaurant descriptions designed around a theme, by year 1999, then-editor Susie Holly and I had cooked up a new format for the dining pages. These features complemented a recipe-driven segment



authored by Jan Campbell. The new design revolved around a major feature on, say, “Run-of-the-Grill Meals” or “Restaurants for Rug Rats,” with sidebars featuring a “Dish du Jour” and “Chef’s Tip.”

Then, in 2001, to meet the public’s growing interest in eating, fed by the Food Network, David Grant, a former restaurateur, expanded the magazine’s Dining section to in-depth foodie features as main course and, as dessert, an Epicurious section, which gives snapshot reviews of favorite eateries. Grant’s direction focused on Southwest Florida’s culinary culture, a new slant that reflected the importance of food in our lives for social and emotional as well

PHOTO COURTESY OF DAVID GRANT

# Parking Pleasure

*Efficiency and Southern hospitality take the frustration out of airport parking*



by Chris Wadsworth

Anyone who has recently parked in the long-term parking area at the new Southwest Florida International Airport terminal has likely come away pleased and even impressed. It's an odd sentiment to feel about a parking lot.

"We're very customer-service oriented," said Tom Nichols, the Department Director of Operations for the Lee County Port Authority. "We want to make the passenger's travel experience comfortable and easy."

Easy, indeed. Pull up to the gate at long-term parking and a smiling greeter is standing there to say "hello." He may then hand you your ticket before directing you toward a flagman who waves you down the correct parking row, where a parking attendant directs you into a spot and then hands you a slip of paper with the number of your parking space. Turn around and a shuttle bus is likely waiting to whisk you off to the terminal building.

Overseeing the whole thing is a dispatcher who is constantly on the radio with the parking team. It's an amazing orchestration of people and precision handled by a contracted company called Standard Parking. In his operations role, Nichols oversees that contract—meaning he isn't so much the conductor of the orchestra, but more



**Tom Nichols oversees long-term parking at the new Southwest Florida International Airport to ensure that customers are pleased and even impressed with the service.**

the general manager of the whole performing arts hall.

"We probably have the largest surface parking lot in the country with door-to-door shuttle service, meaning from the door of your car to the door of the terminal," Nichols says. The long-term lot has 9,200 spaces, and the walk to the closest point of the terminal is about a half-mile.

To make things work smoothly, Nichols and his staff conducted surveys of passengers and came up with a system. Despite the best efforts, it was a rocky start when the new terminal opened in September 2005.

"For about the first month, the bus drivers were just watching for cars to come in and trying to meet people at their cars," says Nichols. "It was helter-skelter and we had to go back and tweak the system."

Today, things are going much more smoothly with a series of set standards and the addition of parking staff that focus on offering a friendly, personal touch.

At all times, there should be at least

one shuttle bus in the parking lot waiting to go, and at least one bus waiting at the terminal to pick up arriving passengers. The longest a departing passenger should ever have to wait at the long-term lot for a shuttle is five minutes.

"We've had a huge decrease in complaints and even several positive comments," Nichols says. "We would much rather receive compliments than complaints."

After nearly 20 years with the Port Authority and a slate full of other responsibilities, including all landside, airside, and terminal operations as well as communications for the airport's fire and police dispatchers, Nichols is happy that parking is one thing he doesn't have to worry about.

"That's an exceptional feeling," Nichols says. "We go home at night knowing Standard Parking is taking care of our passengers, and it's a wonderful feeling." 🐾

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