

Punta Gorda never rests on its laurels

Joined almost daily by new neighbors on the restaurant scene, Punta Gorda's institutions continue to reinvent. And three of the most well-known are poised for improvement.

Straight to the top at the Wyvern

"Going straight to the top" usually means bypassing underlings to get what you want from the top brass.

At Punta Gorda's boutique **Wyvern Hotel**, it's really quite easy to go straight to the top and get what you want. Just press R in the elevator and step out onto the rooftop.

Designer **Carrie Nemeec** of Punta Gorda's **Carrie's Interiors** didn't have it so easy, though. To get her dramatic new decor up on that roof, she had to find a crane. At the last minute.

Other hotels in town might have waterfront sunset vistas, but the Wyvern's rooftop — with pool, lounge, live entertainment and an unequaled panorama of Charlotte Harbor — has always been the high point of not only the hotel but the whole Southwest Florida coast. Locals might not realize it, but there's no other 4+-star hotel rooftop like it, from Sarasota to Naples.

The Wyvern immediately struck new co-owner **Ketan Vora** as the ideal spot for premier lifestyle travel. And now that it has **Perch 360**, its rooftop is transformed in more ways than name alone.

Starting work literally at the top was how Vora and co-principal **Bob Brier**, of Pennsylvania-based **Edgewater Advisors**, felt they could have the most impact before busy season. They're thrilled with how hotel guests, locals and staff have already embraced the Perch 360 renovation.

"We love small communities like Punta Gorda, and properties that are ripe for repositioning," said



PHOTO PROVIDED BY CORINNE WIMBERLY

New bar area at Harpoon Harry's.



PHOTO PROVIDED BY PERCH 360

This week's Punta Gorda Chamber of Commerce Ribbon Cutting at Perch 360.

THE SCENE



Sue WADE

COLUMNIST

Vora. "It's our mission to wow both guests and the local community with an exclusive, yet affordable experience — nice, at a reasonable price.

"The eight-year-old Wyvern checked off a lot of boxes for us: a boutique hotel, in a wonderful, tightly knit, walkable community. A great leadership team with a tremendous amount of creativity. And they got Perch 360 launched in just a couple of months!"

Physical change is the first thing guests will notice at Perch 360. Visitors can nestle in luxurious new cabanas, one with a chandelier; chat around fire pits; and sit, protected, beneath industrial-strength teal umbrellas that are visible all the way from Marion Avenue.

And the new menu is unprecedented, even for a town that now seems to have every conceivable cuisine. Perch 360 will offer gourmet tapas, small plates, and shared plates, complemented by craft cocktails garnished with fresh herbs cultivated in the rooftop garden.

Said general manager **Zack Oxley**, "Some of the tapas are so beautiful that you hesitate to eat it. Then you do and you're really impressed. The Purple Haze salad, for instance, is roasted beets, oranges, vanilla yogurt, farmer's cheese, mint, and edible flowers, in a swoosh on the plate."

Executive chef **Bob Moltzan**, a longtime tapas artist since his days running Tapas One, has been dreaming up dishes for months, trying out eye-pleasing new plates

on happy test subjects at VIP dinners and Tapas Tuesdays.

Oxley said, "When the menu's direction became clear, those were Bob's ways of testing the concept. Now the upstairs aesthetics and menu are on a par with the view."

Vora, a fit, 40-week-a-year business traveler who carefully watches what he eats, added, "Bob Moltzan's background fit perfectly with the type of food I envisioned."

"And thanks to Ketan, we get to actually do it! This is really good," said the elated chef.

In the next few weeks, the ground-floor **Curve Sports Tavern** will also roll out a 600-calories-and-under lunch menu, unique to Charlotte County and just in time for New Year's resolutions.

But don't fret. They're keeping menu favorites and making them healthier. Among them, Beef on Weck remains, just a bit smaller; the burger is nonhormone-treated, source-verified Seminole Pride Beef; and the It's Not a Reuben — Reuben isn't going anywhere.

According to **Summer Holman**, director of sales and marketing, "We're using farm-raised, grass-fed and organic wherever we can. Almost all ingredients are locally sourced, from Three Suns Ranch, Sanibel Seafood, Circle C Farm, Seminole Pride Beef, Nino's Bakery."

Originally LuLu's, a Latin fusion bistro that never hit its stride, then the baseball-themed but often-empty Curve, the downstairs restaurant is primed for change, especially with Moltzan dipping into a fresh new palette.

Vora hinted at future developments: "Next summer, we plan to renovate the downstairs as well, converting the bar to a piano bar and bringing the magic from rooftop to ground-floor dining.

"We're all about adding more variety to a community that already has so many great dining venues. As a business traveler myself, even I feel like, 'Wow! I need to come back, because I didn't get to experience everything.'"

The Wyvern Hotel (941-639-7700) is at 101 E. Retta Esplanade. Perch 360 is open Sunday to Thursday 4 p.m. to 10 p.m., Friday and Saturday 3 p.m. to midnight. Curve Sports Tavern is open for lunch daily 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., for dinner Sunday to Thursday 5 to 9 p.m. and Friday and Saturday 5 to 10 p.m.



PHOTO PROVIDED BY MIKE IMBASCIANI

Mike Imbasciani at 13, performing at Frenchy's Rockaway Grill, Clearwater Beach.

Harpoon Harry's swabs the decks

In 1979, Earl Nightingale's Restaurant opened, overlooking Charlotte Harbor from the prow of Fishermen's Village.

Its Conquistador Room is still lined with original mirrors etched with Spanish galleons, though the initials "EN" that appeared on the massive front door were removed when it became **The Captain's Table** in 1991. Important people had their names engraved on portable brass lanterns, which were seamlessly slipped into place on their tables the instant the VIPs appeared. Not so long ago, waiters made flaming tableside Bananas Foster.

Owner Ron Evans' daughter, **Kelly Liscum**, remembers a time before **Harpoon Harry's**, when there was nothing much downstairs but a little ice cream shop where today's Captain's Table elevator empties out.

Liscum worked for her dad in the 1990s, through high school and college, running food, expediting, busing, opening and closing, serving. She left for a while to teach second grade and start a family, and returned in 2010 to head accounting for Smuggler's Enterprises.

Today, she couldn't be more proud of recent renovations at Harpoon Harry's, where the deck had remained essentially untouched for 23 years. "It needed sprucing up and love, which we've given it. The west side is complete, and the north side nearly so. There are brand-new tables, we enclosed the ceiling, we've got improved lighting and fans, and the tiki bar is larger, accommodating more guests."

Even better, new see-through shades temper the setting sun.

Asked if **Scotty's Brewhouse** has affected business, Liscum replied, "Not really. We saw an increase in sales when the Village Oyster Bar closed. After that bump, we went back to where we were before, so Scotty's got back what was rightfully theirs. We're happy that they're here. The more commerce in Fishermen's Village, the better for the whole Village."

Birth of the blues at The Turtle

As owner **Chris Evans** promised earlier this year, **The Turtle Club** will soon bring us live music that's as blue as the sea turtle swimming its west-facing wall.

It's hard to imagine a better headliner for the birth of the blues there on Jan. 11 — Charlotte Harbor's own 20-year-old guitarist/vocalist, **Mike Imbasciani & his BluezRockerz**.

Imbasciani, the kid in the raffish fedora, learned to play at 5, later joined Gilchrist Park's informal Guitar Army, and launched a professional career at 12.

This old soul's influences span 80 years of the blues: Robert Johnson, Muddy Waters, Bob Dylan, Eric Clapton, Jimi Hendrix, Jimmie Ray Vaughan, and swing/rockabilly revivalist Brian Setzer (of "Stray Cat Strut" and "Jump, Jive an' Wail").

Sounds like the joint will be jumping.

The Turtle Club & Claw Bar (941-637-9477), 139 W. Marion Ave., open Tuesday to Saturday 4 to 10 p.m., turns blue on Jan. 11 from 7 to 10 p.m.

Fishermen's Village — Excellent!

We knew it all along. Now it's official. **Fishermen's Village** is

excellent — for shopping, dining, lodging, sightseeing and boat trips.

The village announced last month that it received a TripAdvisor Certificate of Excellence. To qualify, a business must maintain an overall TripAdvisor rating of at least four out of five, have a minimum number of reviews and have been listed on TripAdvisor for at least a year.

Not only do individual businesses in the village sport their own Certificates of Excellence, now the site as a whole has been celebrated as a tourist destination.

"Receiving the TripAdvisor Certificate of Excellence is a true source of pride for the entire team at Fishermen's Village. We would like to thank all of our visitors who took the time to complete a review on TripAdvisor," said **Kathy Burnam**, marketing and events manager.

Yes, Virginia ...

There is a Santa Claus.

In fact, this year there are at least two of them: **Julio Aguilar and Walter Jimenez of Charlie's Subs & Grill** in Charlotte Harbor.

Take them a child's Christmas toy through Dec. 22, and they'll give you 50 percent off any meal. Only one discount per customer, but take all the toys you want. They're for the Port Charlotte Homeless Coalition and the Salvation Army.

Charlie's Subs & Grill (941-235-2353 or 2359), 4290 James St., is open Monday to Friday 7 a.m. to 5 p.m., Saturday 7 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Send restaurant and bar news and recommendations to columnist Sue Wade at suewade47@aol.com.



SUN PHOTO BY SUE WADE

Fire pits warm the night at Perch 360.