

Prepare to be pleasantly surprised

There's nothing like rediscovering a great place to eat when you least expect it.

A lonely stretch of El Jobean Road, bordered by scrub and double widens, hadn't offered a bite to eat in years.

Things just weren't the same after original owners sold a Port Charlotte institution.

At midday, a boutique Punta Gorda rooftop lounge served only drinks, but not lunch.

Prepare to be surprised, because all that's changing.

Po' boys, boudin, and beignets, oh my!

The road from Port Charlotte's Riverwood to the historic **Bean Depot Cafe** at the foot of El Jobean Pier hadn't seen an eatery since EJ's Family Dining. Later, the Frosted Mug closed over five years ago. The Red Wolf Tavern never served food during its doomed tenure there last year. Neighbors speculated that the rambling restaurant couldn't house a success.

Not if the **Ragin' Cajun** has anything to say about it.

The New Orleans-style

THE SCENE



Sue WADE

COLUMNIST

bar-restaurant opens today, in the hospitable hands of bayou-born **Candice Henderson** and local boy **Nick Simmons**, who've run bar-steak-houses in Tampa and Panama City for years.

"Is it going to be authentic? Just listen to her talk!" said Simmons of his partner's husky drawl.

When Candice was 7, it became her job to have dinner on the table by the time her folks got home from work in Fort Polk, Louisiana.

There won't be a lot of salad choices, says Nick, who admits to having put on a few pounds in their 10 years together. "It's Cajun food, and we're pretty particular about getting it right."

Said Henderson, "I want to do good



SUN PHOTOS BY SUE WADE

Nick Simmons and Candice Henderson, letting the good times roll at Ragin' Cajun.

southern food at a price that'll keep our locals happy. Cajun is what I know, what I grew up on and who I am.

"Everything's traditional Cajun from home recipes, except for our signature Deep-fried Cajun Burger, with onions and cheese, deep-fried in a pastry bun."

Besides that extravaganza, there's every imaginable New Orleanian food on the menu: crawfish boil, etouffee, jambalaya, shrimp and cheese grits, boudin, and three Louisiana state foods — gumbo, Natchitoches meat pies and beignets. There's also a full-liquor bar, with 10 beers on tap. Just look for the big purple building, and *laissez les bons temps rouler!*

Ragin' Cajun (941-345-6667), 4104 El Jobean Road, is open Sunday to Thursday 11 a.m. to midnight, Friday and Saturday to 2 a.m.

You CAN go home again

People don't much like change, especially where the best Reubens on earth are concerned.

So, when popular

owner-manager **Jamal Hishmeh** moved on from his family's **Joseph's Deli & Catering** in Port Charlotte over a year ago, and, later, his parents, **Mary** and **Willie**, and longtime staffers **Tara** and **Michele**, left as well, things just weren't the same.

The Hishmeh family apparently couldn't stay away.

Over 17 years after they started their hometown deli, they've bought Joseph's Deli back, remaining truer than ever to their Hurricane Charley commemorative plaque "Surviving for Our Patrons."

Give them until early February to get organized, then you'll be able to enjoy their warm hospitality again. Meanwhile, they'll honor pre-existing catering arrangements.

Under 600 at Perch 360

Punta Gorda's **Wyvern Hotel** unveiled a stunning new rooftop lounge, **Perch 360**, in December, with cabana seating, fire pits, and its own herb and vegetable gardens.

Now, thanks to the artist's touch of **Executive**



Look for NOLA-themed decor, and a gator or three, throughout Ragin' Cajun.

Chef Robert Moltzan, it has a healthy lunch menu to match. All the locally sourced dishes fall below a 600-calorie threshold but still make it seem like you're breaking your New Year's diet resolutions.

Crowd favorites are the Patatas Bravas fingerling potatoes starter and the Spicy Kim Chee Beef entree with wasabi mashed

potatoes.

The Wyvern Hotel (941-639-7700) is at 101 E. Retta Esplanade. Perch 360 is open Sunday to Thursday 11 a.m. to 11 p.m., Friday and Saturday until midnight. Kitchen closes at 10.

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



Perch 360's "Winner Winner" chicken lunch, with rosemary potatoes, sauteed spinach, pepper pesto and scallion yogurt. 346 calories.



Jamal Hishmeh, back home again at Joseph's Deli.

Economic Development Director named to top 50 list

Charlotte County Economic Development Director **Lucienne Pears** was named one of the Top 50 economic developers in North America by Consultant Connect, a consultancy that matches communities with business site selectors. Pears was one of three Florida economic development officials on the list.

"This annual list recognizing North America's Top 50 Economic Developers is designed to acknowledge the hard work of the top leaders in this field and elevate the conversation around economic development and job creation," said Ron Kitchens, managing partner of Consultant Connect. "Each of the leaders represented on this year's list are beyond deserving of this recognition for their efforts in building our communities."

Pears was hired as Charlotte County's economic development director in January 2016. She worked as the agency's business development specialist between July 2010 and her appointment as interim economic development director in October 2015. During her tenure, Pears developed a partnership with Western Michigan University to operate an aviation training center

Sherri Dennis Biz Notes

in Charlotte County, with academic and internship programs in nearly two dozen other disciplines planned, as well. She orchestrated the sale of 452 acres of the county-owned Murdock Village Community Redevelopment Area to Private Equity Group, which plans to develop 2,400 single-family and multifamily units, 200,000 square feet of commercial and retail space and a 150-room hotel on the site.

Z Interior Decorations Inc. of Punta Gorda Awarded Best Of Houzz 2017

Z Interior Decorations Inc. of Punta Gorda has won "Best Of Customer Service on Houzz," the leading platform for home remodeling and design. The full-service interior design firm specializing in residential interior design, model home decoration and builder services was chosen by the more than 40 million monthly unique users that comprise the Houzz community from among

more than 1 million active home building, remodeling and design industry professionals.

Customer service honors are based on several factors, including the number and quality of client reviews a professional received in 2016. Architecture and interior design photographers whose images were most popular are recognized with the Photography award. A "Best Of Houzz 2017" badge will appear on winners' profiles, as a sign of their commitment to excellence. These badges help homeowners identify popular and top-rated home professionals in every metro area on Houzz.

New Hope Chiropractic will continue with regular schedule

New Hope Chiropractic will continue to offer its usual services of acupuncture, chiropractic and massage despite the recent loss of owner Dr. Rocky Aker. Doctors Gary Thompson and Pat Dower will be seeing chiropractic patients on the normal schedule. Acupuncture and massage services are also available on the normal schedule, six days a week from Monday to Saturday.

The staff wishes to

thank their patients and the community for their outpouring of support during this adjustment period, as they continue to fulfill Dr. Rocky's and New Hope's goal of "healing the world, one patient at a time."

New Hope Chiropractic is at 3440 Conway Blvd., Unit 3B (facing Elmira), Port Charlotte. For more information, call 941-766-1882 or visit pcacupuncture.abmp.com.

Mark your calendar

• **AARP Taxaide**, a not-for-profit arm of the national AARP organization, will provide free tax service to low- and middle-income people who are or are not members of AARP. Tax preparations will begin from 4 p.m. to 8 p.m. on Mondays through Thursdays, and 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Saturdays, beginning Feb. 1 at the Cultural Center, 2280 Aaron St., Port Charlotte, and at Burnt Store Presbyterian Church, 11330 Burnt Store Road, Punta Gorda, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Thursdays and 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Fridays beginning Feb. 2. Take a Social Security card, a photo ID and a copy of last year's tax return at the time of your appointment. For more information,

call 941-625-4175 or 941-268-8280.

Free 'Are You Prepared?' Seminars Continue

Charlotte State Bank & Trust continues its series of "Are You Prepared" estate and investment planning seminars in February at two bank offices. Vice President Christine A. Hause and Portfolio Manager Samuel A. Kiburz of the bank's Trust and Investment Management Services division present important information designed to help attendees achieve the financial goals established for themselves and their heirs.

The free seminars will take place from 10 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. Feb. 7 and Feb. 21 at the Punta Gorda office, 2331 Tamiami Trail, and from 10 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. Feb. 14 at the Murdock office, 1100 Tamiami Trail, Port Charlotte. They are open to the public, but reservations are required. Reservations may be made at any Charlotte State Bank & Trust office or by contacting Francine Wargo at 941-624-1944 or fwargo@csbftl.com.

• **Are You Prepared to Handle Finances Alone?** — Can a survivor access

a deceased individual's assets, manage financial affairs and make investment decisions? Hause shares her expertise with surviving spouses to answer these questions and more.

• **Are You Prepared for Stock Market Fluctuation?** — Kiburz explains how to analyze investments to understand how they will react to changes in the market. He describes ways through active selection to invest in higher-quality and lower-duration non-annuity assets to stabilize a portfolio during turbulent times. The seminars are from 10 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. Feb. 8 and Feb. 22 at the Punta Gorda office, and from 10 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. Feb. 15 at the Murdock office.

• **Are You Prepared with Asset Protection?** — Hause explores whether to title one's assets in the name of a trust or in another way to protect them from creditors and liabilities. She will address umbrella policies and what assets should be covered.

The seminars are from 10 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. Feb. 9 and Feb. 23 at the Punta Gorda office, and from 10 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. Feb. 16 at the Murdock office.

To share business news, send emails to sdennis@sun-herald.com.