

Business View: Café on the Bay Makes Its Move

Lia Martin
Associate Editor

Café on the Bay will soon open at its new location in the Centre Shops on the north end of Longboat Key.

The restaurant has been successfully operating since 1972 at a location in Marina Village at the Moorings behind the gates of the Longboat Key Club.

To move its whole operation from the Moorings became necessary when owners Titus Letschert and Betsie Coolidge were unable to get a longtime lease. The property had been put on the market by Bill Vernon.

It was originally thought the Longboat Key Club would buy the property. In fact, they had made an offer, but the deal did not go through.

With the season fast approaching, Letschert and Coolidge made a business decision to find Café on the Bay a new home.

Letschert has very few qualms about moving the restaurant. He thinks Café on the Bay has thrived because the restaurant was born from the loyalty of Longboat Key patrons, who visited Café L'Europe since it opened in 1972.

To move the location to a more accessible, convenient location should not be a problem.

"We started looking downtown," Coolidge explained, when someone told them about the available location in the Centre Shops where the restaurant Maureen's used to hold court.

When Letschert first saw the space, he

was not sure, but designer Tim Dowling thought it would work.

"Tim put it over the top," Letschert said after the interior was done. "It looks like a yacht club."

As you stand in the interior of the new Café on the Bay there is an intimacy, even a coziness which were missing from the Moorings, even though it is a larger restaurant.

One side of the restaurant has floor to ceiling windows which opens to a pastoral view and outside dining. Models of sailing ships from long ago are shadow-boxed and framed as fine traditional paintings welcome the patron.

Dowling was a designer in Sarasota for years before he retired. Now, he is the owner of Abbott Galleries on St. Armands Circle. He opened the gallery last November.

"I had been dealing with high-end art in my professional life," Dowling said. "It was a natural."

Dowling says that he represents traditional artists who paint in oils, watercolors and acrylics.

Long acquainted with Dowling, Letschert and Coolidge called the designer when they made a decision to move Café on the Bay. In 2004, he had given Café L'Europe a face lift.

"I think we've accomplished what we set out to do," Dowling said on Wednesday.

Not only do you have a pastoral view, the owners brought the feeling of the former dock-side restaurant with them.



Alfonso Montaña

Betsie Coolidge and Titus Letschert toast their latest business move — literally. The Café on the Bay owners gave the restaurant a complete makeover for its new home in the Centre Shops.

Stephen LeBlanc was called on by Letschert and Coolidge to take photographs outside the original Café on the Bay — of the boats and docks and water.

LeBlanc not only owns a successful photographic studio in Sarasota, which specializes in taking creative family and student portraits and real estate exterior and interiors.

He is also the creator of LuxMark, a luxury real estate marketing company, with longtime marketer Art Mahoney.

LeBlanc could have passed the assign-

ment onto his stable of photographers, but chose to take the photographic mural himself.

SignsZoo created the mural from LeBlanc's images.

When you are seated in the dining room you have a dock-side water view on one side, with windows to a beautiful pastoral view on the other.

"What a great idea," LeBlanc says with great admiration. "Take the view with you."

And that they did.

Trolley Stuck in Coquina Beach Sand

Lia Martin
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The state agency Manatee County was depending on to support their desire to extend their trolley service from Bradenton's Coquina Beach down Gulf of Mexico Drive on Longboat Key to St. Armands Circle was a disappointment.

The Commission wanted to extend service to Coquina Beach in October. Officials wanted the state to pay for half of the operating costs of the trolley indefinitely instead of less money and less of a time commitment.

The Florida Department of

Transportation told county commissioners they would offer them a three-year service grant with \$370,000 as the teaser, non-renewable.

Ralf Heseler, MCAT's transit manager, is concerned that after those three years someone else will have to pick up the tab. The county has until April to make up its mind.

Up to now, the trolley service has been operating out of the Manatee County Area Transit department of the county. Trolley service has operated on Anna Maria Island since 2002.

Last year, Sarasota and Manatee coun-

ties got together and thought that MCAT trolleys could run back and forth from Coquina Beach to the downtown Sarasota station every half hour.

It was estimated at that time, to run a trolley full-time from Coquina Beach to the Circle would run the counties about \$1.65 million a year, and at that time Manatee wanted a state grant from FDOT of \$825,000 to fund the installation.

FDOT officials said that no money was available, so Sarasota County thought that maybe SCAT service could be extended northward from the Hilton resort hotel where it dead-ends now.

Manatee County approved that solution, and say it would offer the \$60,000 operating cost for extending bus service north to connect to Coquina Beach's trolleys.

It has yet to come back for approval by Sarasota County commissioners, but as early as January bus service could begin from the Hilton north to Coquina Beach.

"It's critically needed," said Commissioner Joe McClash during Tuesday's commission meeting. "It has to be done with Sarasota County. Work with Sarasota County to bring back the best financial arrangement to operate this."

Reconstituted Survey Team to Reflect Dissention

Survey, from Page 1A

failings of the list of questions on the questionnaire was the lack of ownership found in that document, and a potential problem of leading questions.

After it was decided by a consensus of 4-3 that the survey would continue in spite of the problems, it was proposed by Commissioner Bob Siekmann that one of the two commissioners chosen to be board members of the new visioning survey committee should not be in favor of the survey.

Siekmann felt that the committee refining the survey should have negative and

positive voices as part of the process.

"I need a critical voice on the committee," Siekmann said at that regular commission meeting.

Mayor Joan Webster volunteered.

Monica Daigle, Town planning, zoning and building director, consultant Herb Marlowe, Siekmann (positive voice) and Webster (negative voice) were asked to sit on the new committee.

In that meeting, it was decided that two Town planning board members should also sit on the committee.

Vice-chair James Brown asked the Commission if the two last members of the visioning survey committee could be chosen during the next planning board meeting.

Unlike the Commission, Sandy Gilbert, Town planning board chairman, said they should pick two board members who knew the technical aspects of question writing, somebody who knew something about the process.

Board member Walter Hackett said he liked the Commission's idea of picking out members who would represent both groups of thought.

"There are two very distinct groups here on the PZB," Hackett told board members. "There is a majority and minority position represented."

Hackett thought Dave Brenner and James Brown were two good choices.

Board member George Symanski voiced

the opinion that a negative planning board member could sabotage the visioning survey process.

In a vote taken, it was decided that George Symanski (negative voice) and James Brown (positive voice) be added to the visioning survey commission of four.

Dream, from Page 1A

obtain a builder's permit, which would be an extension to Feb. 17, 2007.

The petitioners' filed an amended petition for writ of certiorari because of that action by the Board in an effort to block a building permit for the Grand Mariner 14-unit condominium project.

Circuit Judge Durand Adams ruled that the amended petition for writ of certiorari was valid on Sept. 19, 2006.

After four years, Dream Island LLC is back to square one.

Could ghosts from the past be cause for worry?

As a historical side note, General Joe Harris had built the Sleepy Lagoon in

1947, and Herb Field bought the resort in 1957 for \$84,700 renaming it the Buccaneer Inn, according to local historian Ralph B. Hunter.

Harris moved to Sarasota in 1954, and disposed of most of his holdings soon after. Field retired in 1992.

Hunter also writes in his book, "From Calusas to Condominiums," that the property included five lots. Before Field sold the resort, it included a modern marina, pool, resort facilities and world-class restaurant. The Buccaneer closed in 2000.

Another interesting note to this particular ghost story is that on April 1, 1987 the Buccaneer Inn Corporation sold the Buccaneer Inn to Dream Island Development Company for \$1.

Correction

In the Sept. 22 edition, Town Commissioner Peter O'Connor did not recommend that the survey committee should have one representative from the commission on the committee who was against having the survey, and one who supported the survey. That attribution should go to Commissioner Bob Siekmann.