



Dining

Good service, value, food at Fisherman's Inn

BY TERRA WALTERS

For Entertainment

No matter the weather, no matter the season, going over the Chesapeake Bay Bridge is, in and of itself, like going on a mini-vacation.

For those of us who live on the Western Shore, it's sort of like stress, deadlines, annoyances and the like seem to fall away mid-span and we can arrive on the Eastern Shore with a lightened spirit and a sense of bonhomie.

All that and you get to meet up with a Delaware friend and have a good meal in the bargain.

The dedication to crowd-pleasing starts immediately at Fisherman's Inn. As we approached the hostess stand, we were buzzing about the deep-freeze temperatures outside. The hostess took note and seated us at a primo table near the fire.

"This is as close as I can get you to the fireplace," she said.

That was just the first example of the kind of attentiveness that has kept its patrons happy with Fisherman's Inn all these years.

Our server, one of several long-term

WHEN YOU GO

WHAT: Fisherman's Inn

WHERE: 3116 Main St., Grasonville.

PHONE: 410-827-8807.

WEB SITE:

www.fishermansinn.com

HOURS: 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. daily.

EXECUTIVE CHEF: Paul Wernsdorfer.

APPETIZERS: \$5-\$15.

ENTRÉES: \$17-\$39.

RESERVATIONS: Not accepted.

CREDIT CARDS: All major credit cards are accepted.

ACCESSIBILITY: Yes.

employees at the restaurant, arrived as soon as we were seated and quickly returned with our Freemark Abbey chardonnay (\$8 a glass, \$30 a bottle), chosen from a wine list that offers a nice selection of quite reasonably priced wines that are well-suited to the menu.

Thanks also to the restaurant for

providing a written reminder on the list with reference to the Maryland re-corking law that changed not long ago: If you do not finish your bottle of wine, they will re-cork it for you but you must store it in the trunk or the rear-most seat of your car when you leave.

Before we leave the subject of bar beverages, let's point out that Fisherman's Inn offers a captivating array of cocktails and beers. They range in price from about \$3 to about \$8, but it would be helpful to have the prices for those beverages listed on the menu.

Fisherman's Inn brings a basket of warm rolls with plenty of butter, but you may want to head them off at the pass and tell them that you don't care for bread. Menu portions are most generous and there are many appealing items on the appetizer list, so you may choose to save room for the really good stuff.

And speaking of good stuff, we got off to a swift start with that in the form of Hot Crab and Artichoke Dip (\$12) and Fried Calamari (\$10).

The crab dip, filled with lump crab and accented with artichoke

hearts (and cream cheese to provide spreadable consistency) has just the ideal amount of seasoning and is an outstanding version of this area fave. Not ideal, however, are the crackers served with it for they tend to get a bit soft when dipped into the steaming crab (or even spread on with a knife). Sturdier crackers or baguette slices might be better suited.

The new decade is assuredly off to a felicitous start in terms of the quality of the calamari. This was the second time since the ball dropped that the calamari experience has been a good one. Chef Paul Wernsdorfer, long in charge of the kitchen at Fisherman's Inn, is a master of frying and a master of seasoning. Put those two skills together, and it equals exceptional calamari.

Not often can you say that squid is so tender it almost melts in your mouth, but this does. The tempura-like buttermilk batter provides just the right crunch and the homemade basil pesto dipping sauce is good enough to eat with a spoon.

(See INN, Page 6)

The Inn at Pirates Cove

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DINING

INN

(Continued from Page 2)

Entrées include two side dishes and both members of our party opted for the garden salad as one of the choices.

A standard offering with a smattering of grape tomatoes and the obligatory slices of cucumber, the salad manages to be tasty because the

greens are fresh and tender. Homemade salad dressings also do their part in upping the ante on the salad's appeal, and both the pepper parmesan and the sweet onion vinaigrette were well received.

One diner had decided upon the Potato Crusted Chesapeake Bay Rockfish (\$23) and chose green beans as the other side dish. The beans were tasty, the accompanying lobster sherry

cream sauce was intriguing, but the fish was spectacular. Nothing beats a fresh filet of rockfish from the Chesapeake Bay, and this was non pareil.

The Mix and Match section of the menu caught the attention of the other member of our party. Here's the drill: Start with a crab cake, fried or broiled, and choose another seafood to match your taste from among a list that included scallops, fried shrimp, fried oysters and crab imperial.

For the unbelievably low price of \$21, a delectable broiled crab cake and a plate full of fabulous fried oysters appeared. The second side dish chosen was the veggie of the day, a noteworthy serving of whipped butternut squash with perhaps a hint of parmesan. Yum.

Chef Paul has won awards for several of his dishes and we would strongly recommend his entering any and every crab cake competition he can find.

A favorite dessert at Fisherman's Inn is the Skillet Brownie (\$6) which piles vanilla ice cream and whipped cream (don't forget the splash of hot fudge) atop your own personal brownie baked in a small iron skillet. But alas, we had not saved room this time. Not only was there no room for dessert, but we were also leaving with a pile of "go" boxes filled with goodies destined for brightening up the next day's lunch.

The story of Fisherman's Inn began about 80 years ago when its founder, Capt. Alex Thomas and his wife Mae, parlayed the crab picking station and oyster shack on that Grasonville site into an eatery. Eventually the Thomases handed over the reins to daughter Betty and

her husband Sonny Schulz; and later the Schulzes' sons would become involved in the business as well.

Indicative of the kind of spirit and perseverance that has made this venture such a success, the Schulzes rebuilt bigger and better after the devastating fire that destroyed the restaurant more than two decades ago.

Also destroyed in the fire was Betty Schulz's impressive collection of oyster plates. True to the Never-Say-Die attitude, Betty rebuilt her collection as well and it is stunningly displayed at the restaurant.

Since its beginning, this has been a family operation. From their family to yours — good service, good value, good food. It's a winning combination.

In the words of manager Dwayne Adkins, "If you leave happy, we've done our job."

DIRECTIONS TO

FISHERMAN'S INN: Take Route 50 across the Bay Bridge to Exit 42. At the end of the exit, turn right at the stop sign and continue 1/8 mile. The restaurant is on the left, across from the Comfort Inn.

A FINAL NOTE: Another Annapolis restaurant has closed its doors.

On Jan. 2, Morton's the Steakhouse at Park Place became the latest casualty in a market that has been seriously affected by the economy in general and the competition for the local restaurant dollar in particular.

We wish their employees luck in securing new positions in the industry.

OF NOTE: The Annapolis and Anne Arundel County Conference and Visitors

Bureau is dedicating February to attracting food lovers to the area.

The CVB has come up with 15 finalists who bring an energy, vitality and expertise to the destination's restaurant scene. To be eligible for consideration, nominees must have been affiliated with a full-service Annapolis or Anne Arundel County restaurant.

The finalists are posted on the CVB Web site at www.visitannapolis.org and you're invited to vote on your Top 10 choices now through 5 p.m. tomorrow. The Top 10 Passionate Culinary Personalities will be posted on Monday.

The 15 finalists include: The finalists include: Chef James Barrett, Westin Annapolis Hotel's Azure restaurant; Di and Ken Chase, owners-chefs, Aqua Terra of Annapolis; Chef Dean Dressler, Gordon Biersch Brewery; Fintan Galway, general manager, Galway Bay; Stacey Jackowski and Carla Lucente, owners, b.b. Bistro; Chef John Jennings, Rams Head Tavern; Ted Levitt, owner, Chick & Ruth's Delly; Chef Tom McReynolds, Herrington on the Bay; John Miller, partner, Level restaurant; Arturo Ottaviano, owner, Osteria 177; William Paine, executive chef-manager, Eggcellence Breakfast Brunchery; Chef Olivier Senoussaoui, Breeze restaurant, Loews Annapolis Hotel; Craig Sewell, owner-chef, A Cook's Café; Executive Chef Philip Sokolowski, Severn Inn; Chef Jerry Trice, Sam's on the Waterfront.

Throughout February, a video introducing the Passionate Culinary Personalities will be posted on the CVB Web site and touted via their Twitter and Facebook streams. Visitors to the Web site will be greeted with links to romantic getaways, discounts and specials, restaurant listings and events, including the Feb. 15-21 Annapolis Restaurant Week.

This is great for tourists and residents alike so nominate your favorite local culinary superstar now.

Terra Walters is a freelance writer and editor based in Annapolis.



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