

Beachy Keen

Our annual roundup of new stores and restaurants at the shore.

By Joe Sugarman



> Party Time

"People have been calling us 'Starboard North,'" says Conch Island Key West Bar and Grill general manager John Wallden, referring to the classic Dewey Beach bar. Indeed, since its springtime opening, Conch Island has become party central in Rehoboth Beach, with its three full bars, a small stage for bands and a dance floor as crowded as any Dewey dive on Saturday night. On Sunday afternoons, the party [spills](#) out onto the avenue with more live music and an all-day happy hour.

Partiers need sustenance, of course, and Conch Island provides ample support via crab cakes, Cuban sandwiches and a raw bar featuring four kinds of oysters and three varieties of shrimp. You also can find conch in the form of fritters, in chowder and served tempura-style with orange horseradish marmalade. Party on! 207 Rehoboth Ave., Rehoboth Beach, 302-226-9378

> Who Dat?

Speed by too quickly on Milton's Route 16 and you might just miss Po' Boys Creole & [Fresh](#) Catch, but this tiny eatery, decorated with Mardi Gras beads aplenty, is worth a stop. What's more, the cozy mom-and-pop is the area's only Cajun restaurant. "These days you have to do something different," says Amy Stewart, who runs the restaurant with her chef/husband, Lee. "You have to corner the market or you won't be around."



Lee honed his Cajun culinary chops working in several restaurants on the Florida Panhandle and knows his way around a roux. Definitely try his blackened scallops with spinach and lemon-caper butter and the shrimp creole with grits. "I turn people who don't like grits into people who love 'em," he says. Route 16, Milton, 302-684-0890, <http://www.poboyscreole.com>

> Fill 'er up!

You won't be able to miss the shockingly bright yellow exterior of Lewes' JD's Filling Station, former home to Blue Plate restaurant and, long before that, a filling station. The restaurant's interior is just as flashy, painted in bright blues, reds and yellows and studded with old license plates, a gas pump, framed road maps and a couple of old automobile [grills](#). Even the waitresses sport Goodyear service shirts.

The J and the D in the name are for Joe Zuber and Darryl Ciarlante, who also run Rehoboth's Dos Locos. There's a smattering of quesadillas and tacos on this menu, but the real draw is JD's big breakfasts—six varieties of eggs Benedict, a dozen different omelettes and a heart-stopping Frosted Flakes-encrusted French toast stuffed with cream cheese and fruit. (Yeah, it tastes "Grrreat.")

Lunch and dinner means fat burgers, wraps, po' boys and fresh fish and steaks. The bar menu lists drinks with names like Anti-Freeze, Windshield [Washer](#) and Transmission Fluid, but we appreciate the plain ol' cans of Natty Boh, which you can add to any sandwich order for just a buck. 329 Savannah Road, Lewes, 302-644-8400



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> Simple Things

The inspiration for the menu at Betty's Pure and Simple is "everything that owner Matt Haley grew up with," says general manager Joseph Ralph of his boss, an Eastern Shore native. "[The ingredients] are everything you can buy at a roadside farmer's stand."

Haley, whose burgeoning restaurant empire also includes Fish On, Bluecoast and three other area restaurants, decided to concentrate on something completely different this time: upscale comfort food. Here, you'll find fried chicken topped with ham gravy and served on a savory waffle doctored up with garlic and fresh herbs, and even a modern take on an old-fashioned tuna noodle casserole with Ritz cracker crumbles. Bright, graphic paintings of women from the "Mad Men" era brighten the muted beige interior. So who is Betty, anyway? "Everybody's Betty," says Ralph. "It's just someone you knew as a kid or an aunt. But she was loved." 18585 Coastal Highway, Rehoboth Beach, 302-645-6160, <http://www.bettyspureandsimple.com>



> Rolling Out a Sequel

It only took 39 years but Rehoboth Beach's legendary Nicola Pizza has finally opened a second location. The much larger space on Rehoboth's main drag is really two different Nicolas in one: Its first floor looks like a casual Italian restaurant with faux Tiffany lamps and handsome blond wood tables; upstairs is The Upper Deck, a sports-themed loft with—count 'em—20 televisions mounted throughout. Both floors boast full bars and similar menus, which include the pizzas and signature Nic-o-bolis, rolled dough stuffed with ground beef, cheese and pizza sauce. 71 Rehoboth Ave., Rehoboth Beach, 302-226-2654, <http://www.nicolapizza.com>



> On the Half Shell

Even before it opened at the end of May, the locals were buzzing about Rehoboth Beach's Henlopen City Oyster House. Owned by veteran restaurateurs Chris Bisahi and Joe Baker, the restaurant, located in the space formerly occupied by longtime favorite Celsius, promises six to eight varieties of oysters from around the country and a long list of fresh seafood on its menu. Done up in oyster-y grays and whites and featuring huge windows overlooking Wilmington Avenue, Henlopen City accommodates 85, with four seats reserved for hard-core bivalve lovers at the sprawling, ice-covered oyster bar. "People just love to sit and watch the oysters get shucked," notes Bisahi, who plans to split the shucking duties with his partner. Fresh fish and local produce dominates the rest of the menu. "We'll probably try some different stuff, too, like skate and cockles," says Bisahi. Wines from small, boutique wineries and eight craft beers on tap help diners quench their thirsts. 50 Wilmington Ave., Rehoboth Beach, 302-260-9193, <http://www.hcoysterhouse.com>

> Mixx it Up

Here's one unique way to be immortalized: Suggest a martini recipe at Mixx and you might just get the concoction named after you. So far, the menu includes the Rachel (pear vodka, mango puree, triple sec) and the Alice (vodka, sour apple, triple sec, splash of pineapple) and 23 others. Martini flights also are available for those who can't decide between, say, the Joey or the Chase.

Most items on the menu of "upscale American fusion" cuisine can be had in large or small plate versions, and "there's something for everyone's palate," says co-owner Ginger Breneman. Indeed, diners can choose from lobster and shrimp curry to a short rib burger with mushrooms and sautéed onions served with truffle [oil](#) fries. Come on a Wednesday and all burgers are 50 percent off. Keyboard virtuoso Matthew Kenworthy brightens up the basement space on weekend nights with his repertoire of show tunes to rock 'n' roll. 26 Baltimore Ave., Rehoboth Beach, 302-226-8700



> Spahr-ing Partner

We've always liked the original clothing designs of Rehoboth Beach's Scott Spahr. His colorful hand-stitched shirts and shorts for men and women feature the perfect patterns for summer. (And where else can you get a truly unique handmade shirt for around 75 bucks?) This season, Spahr has relocated to a bright, cheery space along Baltimore Avenue that better shows off his work. New this summer are graphic tees embroidered with funky patterns or Japanese characters and must-have women's belts in pinks and greens. There's also locally made jewelry by Susie Terry. 43 Baltimore Ave., Rehoboth Beach, 302-226-3804, <http://www.scottspahr.com>



> Dressing Up

Lewes' Aquamarine may have occupied a basement space on Market Street, but that didn't stop local fashionistas from finding it. The women's boutique has grown quite a following since it opened four years ago. Now passers-by on busy 2nd Street can discover the relocated store's funky mix of women's fashions from strappy dresses to shoes to locally made jewelry, too. "I've got clothes in here for the super preppy to bohemian arty-types," says owner Maureen Botti of her expanded offerings, "and you'll never run into someone else wearing the same thing. I'm trying to bring the big city back to Lewes."