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**PAID PROMOTIONAL FEATURE**

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If they’re lucky, the crowd may witness the spectacular sight of a seaplane touching down gracefully on the water.

Most would assume you’d have to drive to one of Florida’s coastal beaches to enjoy such a fun-filled, energetic atmosphere.

Actually, it’s all taking place in a very rural part of Marion County.

This is the scene at Eaton’s Beach Sandbar and Grill, which is located on Lake Weir in Weirsdale.

It is, as owner Randy Keuntjes comically puts it, “the beach within reach in Central Florida.”

And that’s how this historic restaurant different from most. Many guests don’t go there to simply dine and leave. They go there to enjoy cold drinks on the wooden outside deck and a gorgeous lakeside view. They go there to rent pontoon, kayaks, paddleboards, and jet skis or play a game of beach volleyball. They go there to listen to live music on the weekends. They go there to cool down by taking a swim in pristine Lake Weir.

It’s a beach-like experience and resort style destination—a place to eat, swim, play, drink, and be merry.

“I always tell people that wearing flip-flops here is a good idea because they walk on the beach and put their feet in the water,” Randy says.

Countless locals and tourists alike have set foot on the beach since Jay Eaton, a world-champion velodrome bicycling racer, opened the beach up in 1914. A resident of New Jersey, his vision was to create another Coney Island right in the heart of Central Florida. He eventually built a 50-foot boardwalk over the lake, a dive tower, a slide, a boat house, and a three-lane bowling alley.

Since Jay’s death in 1943, three different families have purchased the property Randy, a commercial developer; and his wife, Sue, bought Eaton’s Beach in 2006. Seven years later, the couple rebuilt the two-story lakeside restaurant.

Guests in the main dining area upstairs can gaze toward the ceiling and see lake-themed paraphernalia hanging such as water ski, fishing poles, and an upside-down canoe. The whimsical décor is enhanced with airbrushed graphics on a wooden wall that pay homage to Jay Eaton, including an image of him cycling and an image of his three boys fishing in a canoe. The main dining area also features a series of five glass garage doors that can be opened to let in a little fresh air.

Downstairs, the open-air ski bar evokes a Key West feel with a tiki bar and outside dining for beautiful lakeside views. Out on the lake, a dock and boat slips make it possible for diners to arrive via all types of watercraft.

“People come here in seaplanes, boats, jet skis, and cars,” says Kevin Anderson, managing partner of Eaton’s Beach Sandbar and Grill.

While the entertainimg atmosphere is certainly a big draw, the food is equally enticing. The restaurant is known for its funny catchphrase, “3 Cs and a little BS.”

“Translated, that equates to Cajun, Creole, Low Country, Barbecue, and Spanish. The restaurant’s late chef, Dave Del Rio, melded these five styles together to create a unique and tasty combination of flavors from Florida and Louisiana.

From that combination came the restaurant’s signature cooking style, Florisiana,” a name that is now trademarked. The menu certainly reflects that. Popular Florisiana-style dishes include the Ybor City Gumbo, the Cajun Sweet Fried Chicken, the Shrimp and Grits, the Charleston Shrimp Platter, and the Bronzed Red Fish. From the Florisiana Boils section of the menu, guests can order peel-and-eat shrimp, snow crab legs, or half a pound of each. If there’s enough room for dessert, the bread pudding and orange cake are popular with diners.

“We’ve a chef-driven kitchen,” says Kevin, who previously spent 22 years as Area Director of Operations of TGI Fridays, PF Chang’s and Golden Corral.

“All our food is made from scratch, and people recognize that when they’re eating here. They love our service and food quality and enjoy the fact that we are casual with a plus on quality.”

Eaton’s Beach Sandbar and Grill provides catering both on and off premise for events such as weddings and private parties.

Randy and Kevin have another exciting business venture in the works. They are bringing the same concept to picturesque Venetian Gardens in Leesburg, with plans to open Ski Beach Bar and Grill next December or January. The addition of a new restaurant will go a long way in helping revitalize Venetian Gardens, once a former hub of activity because of its lush landscape, picturesque bridges, and stunning lakeside views.

“We’re excited about coming to Leesburg and getting to know the people there,” Kevin says. “The menu will be similar; and we’ll offer the same level of service that our guests at Eaton’s Beach have come to expect.”