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LONG ISLAND CAFE OFFERS A CULINARY OASIS ON THE ISLE OF PALMS



However, the baguette is warm, with balanced crumb and crust that suffers no balsamic seasoned olive oil but honest sweet butter.

Desserts spin the classic playlists of pecan pie, mud pie, key lime pie and peanut butter ice cream pie. Tricked out modestly with their toppings, they also reflect the owners' commitment to quality ingredients: Flavors that are apparent in chocolate, cream and nutmeats.

An unexpected swell of guests on a recent visit set the kitchen back a few paces, but the atmosphere is so congenial we did not mind the wait. The Long Island Cafe is your resource for casual, home cooking attenuated with local ingredients and an experienced kitchen staff.

For 25,000 years, a narrow spit of land aligned itself along the Atlantic Coast. It was known as Hunting Island and was home to Seewee American Indians, who found the area rich in game and seafood. Its name was later changed to Long Island and in 1899 was renamed again as the Isle of Palms. This popular barrier island is a survivor as is its longtime resident, Long Island Cafe.

In 1986, Buddy and Patty Thomas opened the Long Island Cafe in the Island Center Shopping Center. In its 27-year history, this cafe has been battered by storms (Hurricane Hugo), repositioned by construction (the Isle of Palm connector), rejuvenated by tourists (Wild Dunes) and sustained by locals. Its home is in a beach town with the highly regarded golf and tennis community of Wild Dunes nearby.

The cafe has felt the warm embrace of both resort dwellers and locals with deep roots to the island.

In 2012, the Thomases sold the cafe to Christiana Harsch, Michael Proetto and Ravi Scher.

This trio did not fix what was not "broke." They improved the dining room with new floors, refreshed the interior with white wainscoting and Carolina blue walls. They hung the work of local artists to further ground this simple cafe with nautical and coastal images.

Service is friendly with that nice balance of familiarity and reserve. The staff clearly knew their regulars: from their preferred cocktails to what they ate at their last visit. Many took a seat and, without missing a beat, ordered their dinners.

Ravi Scher, the chef and owner, along with Brandon Scher have crafted a menu that celebrates

the coastal connectedness of the Lowcountry. Ravi Scher was educated at the Culinary Institute of America (Hyde Park) and polished his training at Ritz Escoffier. That French immersion shows.

Seafood is centric on the daily special sheet. Pastas are made in-house, as are most of their dressings, sauces and desserts.

The menu is a modest inventive hybrid of French classicism with South Carolina taste memories woven into the fabric of dependable lunch and dinner staples. Crowder peas and basil aioli, peach salsa and pecan pesto, John Dory and local swordfish, Toby's clams from Breach Inlet and GrowFood Carolina vegetables happily play well together on a menu that showcases simplicity.

Fish prepared in the revered a la Francese manner is finished with a classic beurre blanc. Shrimp and grits awash in a wine reduction sauce sprout a garnish of crispy fried leek strings. Classic filet mignon is puddled with demi-glace and sports a mop of shoestring onion rings.

The French fries are hot, seasoned with salt and spruced up with parsley. The coleslaw is balanced with equal measure given to its tart side and languid mayonnaise glaze.

The side dishes are heavy on starch with fries, grits, and mashed and sweet potatoes forming the core offerings. This is the weak link at LIC. There is a daily vegetable but the selection does not always pair well with a menu of ginger and soy glazed tuna or Parmesan-crusting salmon (a favorite of the regulars at the time of our visit). The featured butternut squash napped with cinnamon and sugar clashed with the rustic Italian flavors of grouper over braised beans, for example.

The restaurant bears witness to the legacy of the Thomases. The new owners had the common sense to honor that patrimony as they enhanced and enriched the dining experience for former and current diners, knowing full well "long" is the operative word for doing business.

by Deidre Schipani



1515 A Palm Blvd.
Island Center Isle of Palms
886-8809

longislandcafesc.com

Bar: Yes

Hours:

Lunch 11 a.m.-2:30 p.m.;

dinner daily 5 p.m.-until;

Sunday brunch 11 a.m.-2:30 p.m.