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Eating Shoreganic

Lulu's at Gulf Shores, Ala., is in the midst of a push for healthier, environmentally friendly cuisine.

by Chéré Coen

Who ever thought that when Jimmy Buffett sang Cheeseburger in Paradise, about a dieting Caribbean traveler enjoying the comfort of “a big warm bun and a huge hunk of meat” at port, that the legendary Buffett meal would turn green?

And we're not talking envy.

Lulu's at Homeport Marina in Gulf Shores serves up the famous Cheeseburger in Paradise, mostly because Lucy (Lulu) Anne Buffett is Jimmy's sister. But even though this menu appeals to America's “carnivorous habits,” it was time to join the green revolution and enlighten restaurant visitors at the same time, said General Manager Johnny Fisher.



Photo by Chéré Coen

Lulu's at Homeport Marina

Lulu's cheeseburgers are now created from grass-fed beef raised at nearby Boutwell Farms in Dothan, Ala. Because the cows are brought up in open grass pastures, they feed on a proper diet — not one loaded with starches. Starches unnaturally fatten up cows, but produce fatty meats for us.

According to the Boutwell Farms Web site, their grass-fed bovines have 200 to 400 percent more omega-3 fatty acids, 400 percent more vitamin E and 200 percent more provitamin A and beta carotene and 73 percent fewer calories and less fat and 66 percent less cholesterol.

Lulu's cheeseburger is still “heaven on earth with an onion slice” — or pineapple slice and other accoutrements — but Jimmy can now feel less guilty about jumping off the sunflower seed diet.

The menu change is also part of the restaurant's long-range goal to buy and serve local food products in an effort to reduce energy consumption, Fisher said, although it's difficult to find enough local produce to fill the needs of the thousands of people who visit monthly. For instance, the restaurant uses 62,000 tomatoes each year, some of which grace the 90,000 burgers they serve annually. The restaurant is unofficially the largest in Alabama, Fisher added.

"We have trouble getting local produce, because of the volume we use," Fisher said. "But we're doing everything we can to change that."

Other environmentally hip changes made at Lulu's include a wind turbine, which "resulted in so much dialogue," Fisher said, adding, "We've got to raise the awareness."

Lulu's 10,000-square-foot restaurant lines the Intracoastal Waterway in Gulf Shores and includes a sandy area for children to play, a Bama Breeze outdoor bar, a snowball stand and a merchandise shop. Live music is offered nightly, and many of the musicians hail from Louisiana. Fisher worked at the House of Blues in New Orleans for years before moving to Lulu's and is in charge of acquiring bands. Currently, he's hoping to lure Sonny Landreth over to Lower Alabama.

"It truly is a family restaurant in that it offers something for everyone," he said.

On Valentine's Day, the restaurant will host a mass vow renewal at 6 p.m. on its "beach," followed by a champagne toast, dance and special meal. Couples are welcome to call and register, Fisher said.

Mardi Gras marks the restaurant's fifth anniversary with a New Orleans brass band performance and 5 p.m. boat parade. Lucy Buffett will be on hand to sign copies of her cookbook, *Crazy Sista Cooking: Cuisine & Conversation with Lucy Anne Buffett*. For information, visit www.lulusathomeport.com.

Recipe: Sweetness

Sugar, spice and everything nice! Your Valentine will love this Italian Cream Cake with Vanilla Cream Cheese Frosting. The recipe is found in the Junior League of Lafayette's newest cookbook, *Something to Talk About, Occasions We Celebrate in South Louisiana*. This would be a delicious way to celebrate Valentine's Day.

Italian Cream Cake with vanilla cream cheese frosting

Cake

1/2 cup (1 stick) butter, softened
1/2 cup shortening
2 cups granulated sugar
5 egg yolks
2 cups all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon baking soda
1 cup buttermilk
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
1 cup chopped pecans
1 cup shredded coconut
5 egg whites, at room temperature

Directions: Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Cream the butter, shortening and granulated sugar in a mixing bowl until light and fluffy. Add the egg yolks 1 at a time, mixing well after each addition. Sift the flour and baking soda together in a small bowl and add to the creamed mixture. Add the buttermilk and vanilla and beat until smooth and creamy. Stir in the pecans and coconut. Beat the egg whites in a mixing bowl until stiff peaks form. Fold into the batter. Pour into 3 greased and floured 9-inch round cake pans. Bake for 30 minutes or until the layers test done. Remove to wire racks to cool.

Frosting

1/4 cup (1/2 stick) butter, softened
8 ounces cream cheese, softened
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
1 (1- pound) package confectioners' sugar

Directions: Cream the butter and cream cheese in a mixing bowl. Beat in the vanilla and confectioners' sugar until smooth.

To assemble, spread the frosting between the layers and over the top and sides of the cake.

Serves 10-12.

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