

BUSINESS PROFILE

Chris Evans and partners launch Crab House

BY KATHY GREY

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It's long been the dream of many in the community to be at the helm of a Charlotte County destination that would draw people from parts near and far. The latest dream was realized by the owners of Smuggler's Enterprises, and the public introduction of the Crab House.

It's easy to envision big weddings and private parties in the new restaurant, with its sweeping views of Charlotte Harbor with magnificent sunsets, spacious rooms and inviting atmosphere.

Chris Evans holds a key interest in the new endeavor. The 28-year-old son of Ron Evans has been working side by side with his father in the expansion of Smuggler's Enterprises since the year 2000. (The company's Web site, smugglers.com, states that Smuggler's Enterprises is a multi-faceted food and beverage operation doing business as Harpoon Harry's & the Captain's Table, John Hall's Goal Post Grill and Sports Bar is also part of the mix.)

Now, Chris Evans and his business partners Bruce Laishley and Rick Treworgy, have spun off the crown jewel of the organization, The Laishley Crab House, opening Aug. 15.

Mr. Evans was born in Sarasota. He has a half brother and a twin sister, a teacher at Deep Creek Elementary School. His grandfather built and developed Fisher-men's Village on Emerald Point in Punta Gorda. His dad, Ron, came to live in



COURTESY PHOTO

Bruce and Barbara Laishley and Chris Evans

Charlotte County in 1979.

Chris Evans graduated from Charlotte High School and moved to Minnesota to run a manufacturing company with a family friend who needed an operations manager who was "good with computers." That company business, specializing commercial vacuum hoses, couldn't be more different than the hospitality industry. But it gave Mr. Evans the footing he would need to take on increasingly demanding roles in the Smuggler's enterprise, where the sun and family beckoned him home.

"The weather and being that far away from your family is a lot," Mr. Evans said. "I went for three weeks without seeing the sun. There was three to four feet of snow on ground. That was a little bit of a reality check."

Coming back to Charlotte County certainly had its perks with its abundance of sunshine and family proximity, but his first six-week project for Smuggler's was anything but glamorous. "I went under

the building of Harpoon Harry's, fixing and re-plumbing the grease and sewer lines." Next step: cooking at Harpoon Harry's and the Captain's Table. When a management position became available, Mr. Evans stepped readily into the role.

And the company grew. New investors bought into Smuggler's and the idea of the Crab House was born.

Of his first spectacularly chaotic week of operations of the Laishley Crab House since its preview on Aug. 4, Mr. Evans' operations talents have been challenged. "There have been logistical challenges. Challenging for the new staff, new equipment, new menu," he said. "We hit a couple of bumps in the road but things are going well. The reception's been terrific."

One of the bumps the Crab House has successfully maneuvered is reducing its original menu — created by general manager Carter Alexander — by 30 percent. "We simplified it for practical reasons," Mr. Evans said. "For instance, we went from seven varieties of crab cakes to three." As the operations end of the new endeavor takes on a steady hum, folks might expect to see a few more options for crab cakes scampering across the menu.

"What everyone's tried to create is a regional restaurant that draws people to Charlotte County and Punta Gorda. We put a lot of thought and creativity (into the Crab House)," Mr. Evans said.

And it shows.

"Smuggler's brought the experience, resources and knowledge to make it pos-

on menu

>> Hearty parties at Laishley Crab House
The Crab House's banquet menu includes

- Smoked salmon mousse
- Fried green tomatoes
- Roasted asparagus with goat cheese
- Sushi, (tempura shrimp, asparagus, salmon, crab)
- Blue or Dungeness crab
- Char-grilled sirloin
- Alaskan King crab legs
- Dijon chicken penne
- Snow crab Florentine
- Homemade hush puppies
- Fried catfish
- Shrimp with bacon and cheddar grits
- Chocolate, Key lime or New York Cheesecake
- Pecan pie
- Homemade apple cobbler

sible. We've got good people. And for that, we're very fortunate."

Meanwhile, the concept of the Laishley Crab House will spread across the land with a re-tooled marketing plan that will include billboards along I-75 and pretty much anything that generates awareness.

The Deep Creek resident's next steps won't take him far from home. "This place is my life — it's my family and I'm not going anywhere. Once this gets up and running and we have it fully operational, we'll fine tune some things and otherwise stay busy staying focused." ■