

06/02/06[John Hackworth](#) column**Harpoon's keeps its tradition**

When participants in the annual Fourth of July Freedom Swim emerge from the brackish waters of Charlotte Harbor, it's quite likely they'll rest up and grab a drink at Harpoon Harry's bar and restaurant. After all, it's a tradition.

The bar celebrates its 13th anniversary on July 4 and, as always, there will be plenty to do and see when hundreds of patrons stop in for the contests, live bands, food, drinks and revelry that Harpoon's is known for. Most of them might not really know the story about how an Army Special Forces veteran decided against a pro golfing career and eventually opened a bar in Punta Gorda.

For the record, Ron Evans is the proud owner of both Harpoon Harry's and the Captain's Table restaurant (which is located upstairs) along with partner Harry Carson. His son, Chris, is operations manager and a partner in a possible future development at Laishley Park Marina.

Father and son are teaming up in a bid to put a crabhouse restaurant on the waterfront at Laishley Park -- just the latest move in a business career that began way back in 1968, when Ron Evans flunked out of college and was drafted into the Army.

It didn't take the brass long to realize the elder Evans had too much talent to be tramping through the jungles in Vietnam. Ron worked himself through OCS training, volunteered for Airborne and was assigned to the 10th Special Forces in Germany, where he became the executive officer of a parachute team and taught HALO airborne techniques to other NATO soldiers all over Europe.

He left the Army after 5 1/2 years and wrangled a job at the El Conquistador Country Club in Bradenton as an aspiring golf pro, sporting a 2 handicap at the time. "A two handicap is good for amateurs, but not for pros," Ron said, explaining why he didn't keep that job long. He did become assistant club manager, and that was his introduction to the food and beverage industry.

Ron went back to school and, in 1976, went to work at the Charlotte Harbor Yacht Club as manager. He moved to the Royal Palm Yacht Club two years later and got involved in the development of Fishermen's Village with Don Donaldson, Bob Anderson and Earl Nightingale.

He was a managing partner in Earl Nightingale's restaurant, at what is now the Captain's Table, before buying out the other owners. He opened Harpoon Harry's in 1993.

Today, son Chris runs a tight ship at Harpoon's -- although he and Ron admit that anytime you mix alcohol and crowds, there will be problems.

Their plans for a waterfront restaurant in Laishley Park -- they have offered the city a deal that includes funding for several amenities at the park -- might be the crown jewel on an interesting ride for Ron Evans.

There is little doubt Ron Evans, an imposing figure of a man atop his Harley Davidson boulevard cruiser, is different from the 14-year-old who rode a Cushman Eagle and the 165-pounder who left the Army more than 30 years ago. But his love for Punta Gorda and the passion for his business remain steady.

"I'm just fortunate that a lot of people have believed in me and helped me," Evans said.