



Once on the verge of closing its doors, Gilligan's has a new lease on life thanks to prominent members of the Lewes community

WRITTEN BY BOB YESBEK
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SET SAIL FOR GILLIGAN'S

Longtime denizens of Lewes can remember when 134 Market Street was nothing more than a rickety landlocked boat. The only thing missing was Ginger, Thurston Howell III and a makeshift coconut radio. Makeshift notwithstanding, that didn't stop current owners Cheryl and Garry Tilton from making the place a Lewes favorite. But the vagaries of boat cooking (and the equally makeshift chicken-coop dining room) finally caught up with them, and the plan was to close. But that was before several prominent Lewes locals came forward to help save this dockside emporium of amazing views and even more amazing crab cakes.

The new Gilligan's Waterfront

Restaurant shares the same address with the original, but that's where the similarity ends. The outdoor deck is roomier, and that nasty tree that loved to drop stuff onto your food is gone. Dining is split into two sun-filled, high-ceilinged rooms on either side of the bar. In a clever design move, the indoor bar is now parallel with the deck bar, thus streamlining service and providing a canal view for patrons sitting inside.

Cheryl's kitchen is well known for unusual takes on otherwise standard items. On one of our visits last summer, the soup special was snapper turtle. You don't hear that all the time! Though we had our minds set on other apps, reviews from a neighboring table were 100 percent positive, so we climbed out of our shell and tried it. It was sublime.



THE FOODIE SUGGESTS:

APP: Start with the Korean Nachos! The brightness of the kimchee plays very well with the short rib.

MAIN: You can't go to Gilligan's and not get Cheryl's crab cake. Lightly seasoned lump in a delicate crust. Surrounded by still-crispy seasonal veggies.

DESSERT: That's part of the Gilligan's experience. Order from the tableside narrative. It's all good, trust me.

The current off-season menu sports similar offbeat dishes. Take the Korean Nachos, for example. Cheryl and kitchen boss Ryan Betts departed from the ordinary by adding house-made wontons and kimchee to this otherwise mundane dish. Add short rib, and it's a winner. You can be sure that there will always be something on the menu that features Gilligan's delicious fries. For the next few months it's all about PEI Mussels sautéed in butter with chorizo, peas and a hint of wine. The frites are reminiscent of the crispy/crunchy potato sticks we used to get at the store — except these are impossibly fresh out of the fryer and crispier than ever. The sandwich menu pays homage to Delmarva with buttermilk fried chicken served with chili mayo. We ordered it all a few weeks ago, and though everyone expressed (faux) surprise at the apparent excess, the plates were immaculate when they were finally wrenched from our trembling hands.

No visit to Gilligan's is complete without Cheryl's crabcakes. Like any regional food, no two crab cakes are ever the same. I've seen them broiled, fried, baked in butter — you name it. ▶



SAUTÉED PEI MUSSELS & FRITES



HERE'S TO YOU: WRITER BOB YESBEK (RIGHT) TOASTS CHEF-OWNER CHERYL TILTON FOR THE DRAMATICALLY NEW AND IMPROVED GILLIGAN'S. A LONGTIME LEWES FAVORITE, THE RESTAURANT WAS RESCUED, THANKS TO THE GENEROSITY OF A COALITION OF CONCERNED COMMUNITY MEMBERS.



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SAVOR THE FLAVORS: GILLIGAN'S PAN-ROASTED FLAT IRON, A STAPLE FROM THEIR ENTRÉE MENU, IS SERVED WITH HERB-ROASTED FINGERLINGS, CIPOLLINI ONIONS, OYSTER MUSHROOMS AND WORCESTERSHIRE BUTTER, EVENINGS AFTER 5 P.M.

The crab cake that has kept Gilligan's in business over these many years is generous — about baseball-sized — with all-lump crabmeat. The outside coating is lightly seasoned with Old Bay, then sautéed to a delicate crunch.

Owner Cheryl is the sole creator of Gilligan's desserts. Truth be told, her heart of hearts lies in the realm of sweets and pastries. That's why it's often a mystery among the guests — not to mention servers and staff — as to what Cheryl has whipped up for tonight. So the dessert menu is always a tableside narrative. On a recent visit, the server very strongly recommended the strawberry/rhubarb pie-cake. It's a pie. No, it's a cake. Gadzooks... it's both! Desserts do not disappoint at Gilligan's.

The obvious value-added at Gilligan's Waterfront Restaurant is the outdoor dining area. Cradled in and among the buildings that comprise The Inn at Canal Square, it faces the dock on the Lewes-Rehoboth Canal. The outside bar is covered, so even if it rains, one can keep one's seat while sittin' on the dock of the ... uh, canal.

It's no secret that the new building's inside design was, shall we say, "acoustically active." But Cheryl immediately addressed the noise issue by hiring a brilliant acoustics consultant to calm the errant sound waves. The new and quieter Gilligan's is tucked down a little hill at the water's edge. The off-season hours are lunch and dinner Wednesday through Sunday starting at 11. Happy hour is from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. every day. Call for reservations at 302-644-7230. See the menu at GilligansLewes.com.

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