



Photos by KATHY HARRISON | The Destin Log

CAMELLIA OPEN: The Camellia Grill is located on the Destin harbor at HarborWalk Village beside another New Orleans favorite, Pat O'Brien's.

Camellia Grill celebrates opening

Restaurant blossoms as latest HarborWalk New Orleans icon

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HarborWalk Village is steadily becoming the little sister of New Orleans with the addition of another one of the Big Easy's legendary eateries — the Camellia Grill.

The diner-style restaurant with counter service and sweet Southern hospitality celebrated its official opening on Thursday with a ribbon cutting at 4 p.m., but they were not ones to turn away the curious few that trickled in ahead of time.

"This is delicious," squealed eight-year-old Leeanne Morrison, while she plucked away at a heaping mound of fries fresh out of the fryer.

Leeanne and the rest of the Morrison family traveled to Destin from Slidell,



ORDER UP: The Morrison and Willis families from Slidell, La., finally discovered the legendary Camellia Grill — as spring breakers in Destin.

La., a small community that skirts the New Orleans metropolitan sprawl. And though they are from the area, they have never experienced the original 61-year-old Camellia Grill, a place that has a cult-like following.

Owner Hicham Khodr purchased the restaurant from the Schwartz family that opened the diner in 1946, but closed it after a brush with Hurricane Katrina. Khodr reopened the restaurant in April 2007, after some subtle prompting from well-wishers.

"We had hundreds of love notes on the door from people telling us to please open," Khodr said.

He brought the Camellia Grill back to life and decided to make the first-ever expansion of the place in Destin, where Khodr said he hopes to turn the restaurant into a beloved tradition just like it is back home.

The Destin Camellia Grill

WANT TO GO?

The Camellia Grill is now open at HarborWalk next to Pat O'Brien's with tentative hours of 8 a.m. to midnight. To view the menu famous for omelettes, sandwiches, pies and freezes, visit thedestinlog.com.

is true to form in most ways. The harbor-side version has the same, white linen napkins, pink and green two-toned paint job on the walls and an identical menu.

In an attempt to really bring out the New Orleans flavor, a part of the staff training was conducted at the original location.

Waiter Nico Ross, 18, a senior and basketball player for Choctawhatchee High School, made the trip to the Big Easy and got to see Camellia Grill at full capacity.

"I saw people lined up

outside on the wall just to sit in one of these seats," Ross said.

One difference is the unique modes of transportation that can be taken to each Camellia Grill. In New Orleans, diners can jump off of the iconic street car line and in Destin, the best parking is in the harbor.

"The prices are really good too," said Leeanne's uncle, Karl Willis, having made his selection from a menu where the most expensive meal is the Chef's Special Omelette with fries for \$8.99.

After a morning of hauling in speckled trout with Backcountry Outfitters, Willis chowed down on the Word Special — a sandwich of double hot sausage on a special roll with lettuce, tomato and mayonnaise with fries. He said it was outstanding with Swiss cheese.

"The cole slaw was good too," he said.

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