

Big Easy in Destin

Camellia Grill brings its New Orleans heritage to HarborWalk Village

By **JENNIFER RICH**
Florida Freedom Newspapers

DESTIN — HarborWalk Village is becoming the little sister of New Orleans with the addition of another 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 Thursday with a ribbon cutting. But staffers

didn't turn away the curious few who trickled in ahead of time.

"This is delicious," squealed 8-year-old Leeanne Morrison as 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, La., near New Orleans. Although they are from that

PLEASE SEE BIG EASY | B2



KATHY HARRISON | Florida Freedom Newspapers

The Morrison and Willis families from Slidell, La., discovered the legendary Camellia Grill as spring breakers in Destin. They never have eaten at the restaurant in New Orleans.

BIG EASY from Page B1

area, they have never eaten at the original 61-year-old Camellia Grill, which 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 Hurricane Katrina in 2005. 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 expand 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 is true to form in most ways. The harbor-side version has the same white linen napkins, pink and green paint job on the walls and an identical menu.

In an attempt to bring out the New Orleans flavor,

some of the staff trained at the original location.

Waiter Nico Ross, 18, a senior at Choctawhatchee High School, traveled to the Big Easy and saw the 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 between the two Camellia Grills is the transportation to get there. In New Orleans, diners can jump off a street

car. In Destin, the best parking is in the harbor.

“The prices are really good, too,” Leeanne’s uncle, Karl Willis said, after choosing from a menu in which the most expensive meal is the Chef’s Special Omelette with fries for \$8.99.

Willis chowed down on the Word Special, a sandwich of double hot sausage on a roll with lettuce, tomato and mayonnaise with fries.

“The cole slaw was good, too,” he said.