

coastal cuisine

Couple comes home to serve up southern comfort

By Marsha Bacenko
Correspondent

I'm always excited when I hear about a new restaurant opening on the beach. This past winter, Scott and Melissa Shields opened the Blue Moon Beach Grill Surfside Plaza in Nags Head, and after checking out their menu, I was eager to taste the food.

They've transformed this small storefront eatery into a cozy and bright venue. A small, covered tiki bar, seating nine, is the center focal point, with the open kitchen in full view. An L-shaped dining area surrounds the bar. Colorful beach-themed paintings grace the light yellow walls, and reggae in the background adds to the sprightly atmosphere.

Scott Shields told me his father collected the lines of buoys over the front door and windows – while kayaking. Outside, a raised platform with picnic tables promises to provide a pleasant wait or post-dinner loll about – especially with cool easterly breezes coming off the nearby ocean.

The Shields' mantra is "Southern comfort food with a

creative flair." However, some of the items on the menu reminded me of years spent at the Jersey shore, where fellow voracious house mates and I would seek out comfort food. The Nags Head grill's baked Italian sausage grinder, topped with fried onions, tomato sauce and mozzarella cheese, and the rib eye and cheese hoagie with fried mushrooms made me think that in some cases, North and South think the same way.

I might still crave that comfort food, but I'd also go for the Blue Moon Beach Grill's Mahi Mahi BLT, seared and served with Applewood smoked bacon and jalapeno remoulade, or the "chick decluck," a barbecued chicken breast topped with pineapple, cheddar and cilantro cream.

My friend and I sampled several of the items on the menu, meaning extra plates for sharing. She started with a zesty appetizer of Buffalo shrimp, served fanned out over greens (\$8). The large fried shrimp, smothered in a spicy red sauce, were served with a cool herb-infused bleu cheese and butter-milk dressing.

I thoroughly enjoyed my



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fried calamari (\$7). They were bathed in a sauce I've never encountered before. The combination of white wine, lemon butter and finely diced cherry peppers combined for flavor with a zing – made me want to go home and try to re-create it.

For an entree, I went with the Caesar salad, topped with juicy fried oysters (\$9). The classic salad got a twist, with smoked bacon, tomatoes, caramelized sweet onion and Parmesan. The addition of a squirt of grilled lemon to the creamy dressing added a brightness of flavor.

My friend's crab cake sandwich was sweet blue crab, with very little filler, and sea-

soned with a light hand (\$11). The tangy jalapeno remoulade added some pretty good heat. It came with a mound of very thin, skin-on French fries.

So how did the Blue Moon Beach Grill come to be? This young and energetic couple met on the Outer Banks years ago. Scott Shields, a culinary school graduate, met his future wife when he went to work for Mulligan's, where she was working. Chemistry happened.

They moved to Staunton, Va., where Shields worked as a chef for nine years. When an opportunity came to open their own restaurant back on the Outer Banks, they jumped on it, getting everything together in a scant three months before opening in February. Add

going?

Where Surfside Plaza, milepost 13, Nags Head, 261-2583

Hours Lunch and dinner, Tuesday through Saturday, 11 a.m. to 9 p.m.

Smoking Non-smoking restaurant

Children's menu Yes

Handicap access Yes

Credit cards All major credit cards accepted

to this their 1-year-old son, and they have plenty on their plates (no pun intended!)

When I asked Shields about his focus regarding the menu and food, he said, "I like to eat! I'm very particular about ingredients and freshness."

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