



NEWS RELEASE

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Hamilton Family Celebrates 60th Year of Ownership

CLEARWATER BEACH, Fla. (April 1, 2024) -- Established in 1926, the Palm Pavilion has been owned and operated by the Hamilton family since 1964. This year marks their 60th anniversary. After repeated approaches by Howard Hamilton, Jessie Smith, one of the original owners who created the beach enterprise, sold the business on April 1st to Howard and his wife Jean.

"Announcements made on April Fool's Day are often questioned if real or not," said Ken Hamilton, president. "If the family promoted April 1st as the start of their 60th year of ownership of the Palm Pavilion, would anyone believe the story?"

The second-generation Hamilton family's decision to take a delayed, low-key approach to this special day was because it also fell during the height of spring break. They've long believed the customer experience comes first and there would be plenty of time to celebrate later. However, third-generation family members did not get the message. Continuous live music was booked from early afternoon to closing with Greg West performing from 1:00 to 5:00 p.m. followed by the Matt Winter Duo. To commemorate this special day, 60¢ draft beer was available from popular brands Bud Light and Michelob Ultra, along with local crafter 3 Daughters Brewing Company. The latter provided giveaway items.

In the early evening, the second-generation family members gathered to thank everyone for coming and for their continued patronage. Their deceased parents - Howard in 2012 and Jean in 2017 - were also recognized. By education and trade Howard was an engineer; he continued working his day job after assuming ownership while long-time staffers ran the daytime operation - a snack bar and bathing pavilion and selling retail merchandise and accessories. Jean stayed home to raise their four boys.

In the 1960s, vacationers were coming annually to Clearwater Beach to winter for two weeks in a mom and pop motel. After breakfast, they would spend their day on the sand. While there, Howard hoped they'd get thirsty or hungry. After dinner in their motel room, visitors would go to the mainland to see a movie or get an ice cream. Day visitors would come to the beach, rent space at the pavilion, change into beach attire and store their clothes.

As the business prospered Howard and Jean became increasingly involved in the day-to-day. Each of their sons worked at The Palm from a young age - sweeping sand from the wooden floor, keeping the beer iced down in large tubs, dispensing locker keys, taking food and drink orders, and later flipping burgers in the shoebox-size kitchen.

As social formalities changed beach-goers arrived on the island wearing their swimwear. As visitor habits changed, the Palm Pavilion adapted. A miniature golf course was built on adjoining property around the late 60s or early 70s. In the early 1980s, Howard removed the bathing houses. The area was later converted to parking for guests of the adjoining Palm Pavilion Inn, another family venture.

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There's no place, like this place, anywhere near this place, so this must be...the place.

60th Year
Add One

Recognizing the Palm Pavilion offered one of the most beautiful locations on the island for sunset watching, and that visitors were now going out to eat rather than dining in their motel rooms, the Hamilton sons took to convincing their father it was time to make more changes. Slowly Howard acquiesced to keeping The Palm open after five o'clock and expanding the menu beyond hamburgers and hot dogs. In 1995 an outside deck overlooking the Gulf of Mexico was added. Guests could now dine outside, listen to weekend live entertainment and watch the sunset.

And right the sons were. Due to its popularity the Palm Pavilion Beachside Grill & Bar enlarged the outside deck a second time within five years. The tiny kitchen was moved to the east side of the building into larger quarters - 20 times larger than before. The vista on the west wall was opened, showcasing a panoramic view of Clearwater Beach and the Gulf of Mexico. Once again the menu was expanded. Today, it offers seafood, chicken, ribs, wraps, sandwiches, salads and taste-tempting appetizers. In true pavilion style, hot dogs and hamburgers remain featured items. Live entertainment is offered daily in the afternoon and evenings throughout the year.

The retail store turned women's beachwear shop moved over the years to various locations in The Palm but closed to make room for the restaurant's indoor air-conditioned dining room. A small beach shop featuring Palm signature clothing and sundry items remains today and is where the to-go menu orders are picked up.

With every change, the family sought to preserve The Palm's charm and architectural integrity while keeping it a place where all ages could feel welcome. A young couple that came in the 1960s returning 50 years later to celebrate an anniversary could still recognize the Palm Pavilion. And not just because some of the lattice work, but because the Hamiltons have worked diligently to maintain the historic atmosphere and keep the look, like the wooden floors that open to the sand beach, and the casual feel.

Today, Ken, the oldest of the four sons, oversees the business and is joined by his brother Wade, who manages the restaurant and inn's physical plant and beach umbrella and cabana rental concessions. One of the grandsons is a restaurant manager, and another is responsible for its retail operation.

According to the state of Florida, the Palm Pavilion is the oldest operating beach pavilion in the state. Research shows this designation also encompasses the entire southeastern U.S.

The Palm Pavilion Beachside Grill & Bar is at 10 Bay Esplanade on north Clearwater Beach. For more information, call 727-446-2642 or visit www.palmpavilion.com.

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Editor's Note: Images are available upon request.