

Plantation a fine addition to LBI neighborhood

By CINDY NEVITT

For the Press, (609) 272-7262

Marty Grims already had a footbridge and a boat. What he needed was a plantation.

So Grims, the owner of Passarelle (French for footbridge) in Radnor, Pa., and the Moshulu, the floating restaurant in Philadelphia, bought himself a Plantation on Long Beach Island. And what a beauty it is.

Plantation Restaurant & Bar in Harvey Cedars was the Owl Tree up until February, when Grims purchased the property. A landmark for decades, the Owl Tree had a loyal clientele that was scandalized to learn that the restaurant was being replaced by a new business with a new concept. Worse, it was being painted yellow!

"There was some apprehension on the locals' part," says Brian Sabarese, the general manager of Plantation. "Sort of a feeling of 'How could you?'"

But the natives have settled down, having seen that the Plantation plans to continue the Owl Tree's tradition of being a year-round establishment.

Determined to have the restaurant open by Easter, Grims — who also owns Tango in Bryn Mawr, Pa.; Basil in Paoli, Pa.; and Du Jour, a gourmet market in Haverford, Pa. — moved Sabarese, his G.M. at Passarelle the last five years, back to the shore where he grew up and gave him three weeks to turn the place into a showcase.

Allan Vanesko, executive chef at Passarelle, was made a partner in the business, along with his wife, Megan. Vanesko is also chef of Plantation, in charge of creating the New American menu that fits in on an island that's home to such progressive eateries as Yellowfin and Blue.

An interior decorator with a great eye for detail was hired to turn the Owl Tree into the Plantation. The Tommy



Staff photo by Bill Gross

Chef Allan Vanesko and general manager Brian Sabarese opened the Plantation Restaurant & Bar in Harvey Cedars this summer.

Bahama theme, restaurant name, menu and design all came together at about the same time, resulting in a two-story restaurant that is very suggestive of the Caribbean.

Wickerlike chairs are pulled up to tables that have woven palm tops. Cloth lampshades, patterned with monkeys and cheetahs, hang over tables along the front wall and the bar. Framed prints of whimsical monkeys, some eating bananas, hang on the walls. Wooden screens are suspended from the ceiling, creating a divider between levels in one downstairs dining area, tiny spotlights are focused on

each side of the screen to give the art better play.

Palm trees are potted in large containers. A low, pressed-tin ceiling painted mocha blends with the room's green, yellow and beige hues. Tables are set with green ceramic plates in the shape of a banana leaf, with a rolled, white linen napkin set on top of each plate.

The motif is repeated upstairs, where formerly a Victorian décor presided.

The same kind of detail has gone into the menu. Sabarese's favorite dish is the wasabi-crusted Chilean sea bass

Plantation Restaurant & Bar

WHERE: 7908 Long Beach Blvd., Harvey Cedars

WHEN: Open daily 11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. for lunch, from 4 to 10 p.m. for dinner.

SERVICE: Liquor license. American Express, Discover, Mastercard and Visa accepted. Disabled access via ramp in rear. Smoking permitted at bar.

PRICE: Appetizers \$7.50 to \$9.75, entrees \$9.50 to \$26.50

FURTHER INFORMATION: (609) 494-8191

BETWEEN YOU AND ME: The Plantation has the integrated look chain restaurants go for, but achieves it with far more subtlety and class.

with Asian stir-fry, drop dumplings, miso and orange-ginger vinaigrette (\$24.50). The jerk-rubbed pork chop with potato pancake peppers, corn cob and melon-mint mojo (\$21.50) is another hit with customers.

The menu will change seasonally, so if you're in the mood for semolina-dusted Jersey flounder with corn fritters, vegetable slaw and gribiche sauce (\$15.75), you might want to swing on over to the Plantation sooner rather than later.

Equal thought and care went into the selection of 15 wines that are available by the glass and the esoteric draft beer choices. Among the more unusual pours: Chimay Triple, a Trappist beer; Hoegaarten, a wheat beer; and Paulaner Hefe-Weizen. Vintage rums, upscale tequilas and malt beverages also are available.