



The Beachcomber's Roving Rogue

By Bill Campbell

As this is the last issue of the year it's traditional for columnists to do a "Year End Wrap Up." Traditional, I say.

So we won't do it here.

I will eschew the obvious by recollecting a few special moments though. We can start with Thanksgiving dinner at Harbor Docks. What a wonderful way to get in the spirit of the season! And the food rocks, too. A special time, that. Uplifting, even.

Being a budding oenophile I can't rave enough about the wine festivals at Seaside, Sandestin and Chan's Wine World. Truly first-rate, all. A recent wine dinner at "The Best of..." winner, Vin'tij, was equally exceptional.

If I had a "Best Surprise" category — and I guess I do now — it would be for the French Quarter in Niceville. The recent addition of a listening room for guitarist Ted Shumate and his combo only make it more special. And the food is exceptional, the prices delightfully reasonable, and on the nights Ted and his guys are there it's magical. Give it a whirl.

My other Best Surprise is going to sound goofy, but the nod goes to Dave's Dawgs in Destin Commons and other South Walton venues. I never thought I'd drive 15 miles for a damn hot dog, but Dave's does it.

Ditto for excellence, though not of the "dog" kind, to the Big City Café in downtown Fort Walton Beach. Excellent chef, servers, food and smiles. Not to mention The World's Best meatloaf. Whadda terrific place.

On the music scene, well, I raved enough about the Gulf Coast Symphonia enough last issue to let you know how terrific that group is. And it's great to see Funky

Blues Shack open a second location in Baytowne Wharf, a truly special little village.

Closer to my Fort Walton Beach home, no one is happier than I that Scully's is making it Big Time. On the water at the foot of the Cinco Bayou Bridge, it's got it all: great food with pizzas and stromboli being favored, live music nightly (save for a beautiful and gifted karaoke leader name of Lori Ware on Thursday nights—she rocks!), the NFL Ticket and TVs everywhere.

And the music ain't fresh off the melon truck. There's Chris Hayes, Bill Garrett, Tim O'Shay, Justin Case, and "Retroactive" with Norris Mealer and Susy Murphy. Even caught Dread Clampitt in the big room last week. (Catch 'em wherever you can. Instant happy.)

We interrupt this column to bring you three *bon mots* from The Vent in the Atlanta Journal-Constitution courtesy of Destin *bon vivant* Dick Geron:

- I'm addicted to placebos. I would quit, but it wouldn't really matter.
- If you aren't interested in driving, how about getting out of the left lane and find another hobby?
- Life Lesson No. 988: Never give a retired person your email address.

Having said that, there's a retired physician in P'Cola who peppers me with emails about jazz, one of my few remaining passions and one which doesn't require a pill. He's Dr. Norm Vickers and was the founder of the Jazz Society of Pensacola, a vibrant group with something always going on. As in Jazz Gumbo Jan. 15th at Phineas Phogg's in Seville Quarter.

It's a festive time (from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.) and in January it features the Modern Jazz Trio, a project of the University of

West Florida's music department under the direction of really-good-pianist David Shelander, director of jazz studies. The performers have studied the artistry of the most successful piano trios and integrated them into a style of their own.

It's all yours for \$10 for non-JSOP members, \$7 for the hipsters. And you get a free cup of gumbo to boot. Or to eat, up to you.

Duke Bardwell Department: I first met Duke when he was maitre d' at Criolla's, truly one of the finest restaurants you'll ever enjoy. It's out on Hwy 30A, just west of Seaside. His storied life includes playing bass for Elvis during the last two years of his life...Elvis's, not Duke's. (NY Times and James Kilpatrick now allow apostrophie-esses for sounds that require another "S" sound.) 'Bout time.

Anyway, The Dukester got another gig at the now-torn-down Frangista's, on "Old 98." He was resplendent in his tux as the maitre d' and greeter...it was a splendid place, rent asunder because a doctor should never manage a fine-dining restaurant.

So my (ex) lady and I visited often, and on one night Duke was in the kitchen washing the crud off dishes with a high-powered hose, tux on. I asked him what the hell he was doing, and he replied, "Nothing shuts down a restaurant faster than a dish washer not showing up."

And it gave me a special appreciation for the folks behind the scene. As when I used to visit the "Old" Pandora's in Fort Walton Beach. I was a frequent customer, and while many used to ask for their favor-

ite waiter, I'd ask for my favorite *busser*. He was a young lad named "Scotty," and his mother was the hostess.

But the lad kept our table loaded, pristine, and happy. I'd call for reservations and say, "I'd like Scotty for my table." This caused a bit of confusion — some people had favorite waiters, but I had a favorite *busser* — but I'd get him. And all was well for the rest of the evening.

This leads me into a New Year's salute to the greatest bar-back I've ever seen. A young man name of Drew who works at the aforementioned Scully's. He lugs kegs, dirty dishes, clean dishes ... you name it. You'd probably not notice him, until he doesn't show up, and then the place would fall apart, just as Duke said.

So as New Year wishes go, I'd like to salute Drew McCulloch and hope he realizes his potential. His obvious smarts. Right now he wants to do tattoos, something he's very good at.

But someday he's going to awaken, 10, 20, 30 years down the road and realize he has no 401.K, no Roth, no medical, no dental, no nothing.

So, Drew, my hope is you get your butt into OW College or somewhere where you can do so much more than you know you can. Because you can, Drew. You're my "Man of the Year."


Go get 'em lad, you'll be the best at whatever you try. Reach high.

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