

Community Matters

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www.destin.com

SECTION B

"They're really good. The bread's really buttery — awesome."

—Brittney Wiley, 16, Fort Walton Beach

"Best \$5 meal I've had lately."

—Bill Buice, over 70, of Pensacola

"The bread's really good."

—Joel Rodriguez, 16, of Gulf Breeze

"Every time I come here I get one. They're great. They're so good."

—Jearim Craig, 15, Gulf Breeze

"Really good."

—Jillian Mankoff, 16, of Navarre

"It's something quick. It's something good and he uses quality hot dogs."

Is it worth \$3.50?

"Absolutely."

—Christopher Hoffman, 21, of Niceville

"The most wonderful hot dog I've had in a long time. That bun was toasted, the hot dog was hot, they were served hot."

—Lil Buice, over 70, Pensacola



DAVE'S DOGS

"It's All In The Bun"

Sellin' hot dogs — hand over fist

■ For \$3.50, you get a bite to eat, entertainment

By Jim Wagner
Staff writer

Dave Del-Doni says he has sold more than a million hot dogs. In the past six years. In the Destin area.

And the next frontiers for his Dave's Dogs eateries are the entire United States and maybe after that, the world.

"I'm 43 years old right now and I could write a book" about my life, he says matter-of-factly in a wide-ranging conversation.

Mix in a broken household as kid, a grandma and grandpa on his mom's side who pretty much raised him in Huntington, W.Va., a touch of the circus, a magic act, Las Vegas, casinos, Nashville, cooking and sewing, and you've got Del-Doni.

"Before we came here, I said I had a vision of a hot dog stand on the beach," he says.

Six years ago, he and his second wife, Karla Delmonaco, decided to move to Destin.

Living for awhile in Nashville, he said, he often heard people talk about Destin and what a great little community it was and how it had such great beaches.

From Grandma Reta and Grandpa Lloyd Loan, Del-Doni says he learned two things: how to cook and how to sew.

He put one of those skills, sewing, to work in Nashville in the early 1990s. He says he worked with Stella Parton, Dolly's sister, in road management and wardrobe.

He was a sous-chef at one time. In Las Vegas, he met Karla, who was in high-end retailing with clothing and shoes.

He also had a line of clothing, Class Act Designs. It doesn't exist anymore.

"This craziness in my life started years ago," he says. Grandpa gets the blame, or the credit.

So today, he's making a living selling hot dogs — at \$3.50 a pop.

"I'm going to tell you, I'm going to be the next Col. Sanders, of hot dogs," he says. "I'm here and it's going to happen. It's my destiny."

He's quick to point out that each and every customer gets more than a bite to eat.

Free of charge, you might say, each customer also experiences "quality, service and the entertainment of it," Del-Doni is quick to



Log photo by JIM WAGNER

HAVE A HOT DOG: Dave Del-Doni passes a freshly cooked and boxed hot dog to a customer at his kiosk at Destin Commons. Del-Doni sold his first hot dogs six years ago on the beach in South Walton. Now, he has outlets at Silver Sands Factory Stores and Destin Commons.

point out.

"If you sell yourself high-end, you are high-end. If you sell yourself cheap, you're cheap," he says.

And if you want a can of soda pop or a bottle of water or a splash of homemade chili on the hot dog, you'll pay a little more than \$3.50.

Del-Doni sold his first hot dogs from a cart on the beach near the Pompano Joe's restaurant in South Walton. Then he set up on the beach near the now-raised June's Dunes eatery near the Back Porch restaurant in Destin.

For a short while after that, there was an interruption in his hot-dog career.

But then he hooked up with the popular Silver Sands Factory Stores outlet mall — and doors began to open, he says.

It's not unusual to have to wait in a crowd clustered around Dave's Dogs at Silver Sands. His hot dogs are that popular.

In May of this year, the management at Destin Commons gave him a kiosk.

Now, any shopper at Silver Sands and Destin Commons can eat a Dave's Dog hot dog seven days a week.

"My business is built on repeat business now," he says. "People say it's all in the bun. That's now my signature."

The buns come from out of state, from back home in Huntington, W.Va. The hot dogs are Ball Parks.

Someday, he intends to have a 24-hour drive-through Dave's Dogs right here in Destin. Not only that, he also intends to have five outlets in Destin someday.

Investors from Lake Charles, La., who like the business and intend to go into Dave's Dogs franchises, will be his financial allies. Nationwide, then worldwide.

"I'm here and it's going to happen. It's my destiny," he states flatly.

And it'll be hot dogs only — no chicken, no burgers. Just hot dogs, cooked in beer.

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This time of year, Del-Doni has a

staff of five for his two outlets. In the summer, he uses a staff of 10.

And providing jobs is only one of the ways he contributes to the community. He's building a float that'll be seen in parades. "It's gonna be a concert on wheels," he says.

He also has a 1973 VW Thing automobile with a hot dog on a surfboard mounted on it.

His new bright-yellow Mustang will be emblazoned before long with the Dave's Dogs logo. And he wants a license plate for it that reads MUSTARD.

Del-Doni winds up the conversation by saying, "My business is out of control. Destin's on the map now, but I'm telling you, Destin's gonna be known for Dave's Dogs."

And later, at some as-yet undetermined stage of his life, he promises there's more to come. He hints that it'll be something on the order of evangelism.

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Log photo by JIM WAGNER

SERVE IT UP: A couple of hot dog eaters prepare their Dave's Dogs meal.