BEACHING 2022

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Doc's Seafood & Oyster Shack is serving up a new take on the boozy beverage

PLUS: Get off the beaten path with a visit to Bamahenge

What it takes

Their training room is the beach. It might be where Orange Beach Surf Rescue saves your life.

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A publication of Gulf Coast Media

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Beachin' magazine is published quarterly by Gulf Coast Media, 901 N. McKenzie Street, Foley, AL 36535 251.943.2151

Distributed free by The Alabama Gulf Coast Convention & Visitor's Bureau and at other locations throughout Gulf Shores, Orange Beach and Fort Morgan.

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GULF CSAST MEDIA

about the cover



Second-year Orange Beach Surf Rescue Lifeguard Sam Pelt, Orange Beach Fire Department Beach Safety Divison Chief Brett Lesinger and Beach Safety Supervisor Jenna Mogan stand for a photo near the Cotton Bayou Beach access point in February during a break in training. Photo by Micah Green.

cover story

How Orange Beach lifeguards train to potentially save your life 21

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Dunes

Multi-generation coalition working to restore beachside barriers

Bamahenge

Our inaugural installment of nearby places to explore off the beaten path



Bushwackers

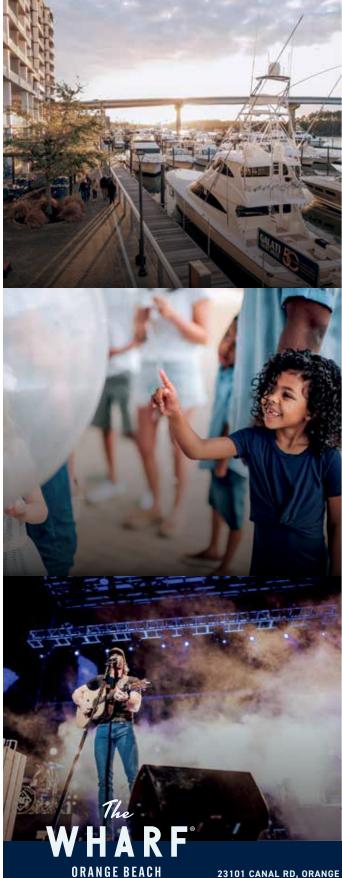
A brand new flavor at Doc's tops our local guide to the frosty, boozy beverage

Fred Investigating the island's urban legend



Volleyball

Photos catching spikes and dives from college beach volleyball at The Hangout



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UPCOMING EVENTS

Photos with the Easter Bunny: March 26 - April 16 Bunny Hop 5K & Fun Run presented by Pleasure Island Junior Woman's Club: April 2 Easter Egg Hunt presented by The Island Church: April 2 Bama Coast Cruisin': April 28 + 29 The Invitational: May 6 + 7 Tim McGraw at The Wharf Amphitheater: May 14 Kenny Chesney at The Wharf Amphitheater: May 19 Orange Beach Billfish Classic: May 20 + 21 Pepsi Beach Ball Drop: May 27 Phish at The Wharf Amphitheater: May 27-29 So. Much. Summer. Nightly Events: May 30 - Aug. 4 Jimmy Buffett at The Wharf Amphitheater: June 2 Koe Wetzel at The Wharf Amphitheater: June 4 Friends of Army Aviation Helicopter Rides: June 15 + 16

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Building community

Students, teachers, conservationists and naturalists are working together to recycle Christmas trees and plant native grass. They know the best medicine for our beachside dunes is care, action and getting their hands sandy.



Words and Photos by Jessica Vaughn

Mist rolled across the Gulf Shores beaches the morning of Feb. 23. Those strolling beside the water noticed a strange sight. Rows of old Christmas trees were placed along the coastal dunes by the Gulf State Park Pavilion. As the sun rose higher and the fog began to dissipate, vehi-cles started arriving. Soon, the beach was filled with employees from Dune Doctors, Gulf State Park naturalists and teachers and students from Gulf Shores City Schools. They all shared one goal: to install over 4,000 native dune-building plants to create a new row of coastal dunes to help sustain the beaches. "The recycled Christmas trees stick out into the air column and help capture wind-blown sand," said Kelly Reetz, natural

and help capture wind-blown sand," said Kelly Reetz, natural resource planner for Gulf State Park. "The students are planting native dune-building grasses around the trees to help retain that captured sand. Because the vegetation holds the sand in place, a new row of coastal dunes will form over the trees."

Dune Doctors, a coastal erosion control firm specializing in restoring and preserving native coastal landscapes and protective dune ecosystems, designed Planting for Protection to promote coastal resiliency through hands-on dune restoration.

On Feb. 22, teachers from Gulf Shores schools headed to the beach with 39 high school and seventh-grade students who were selected to become P4P Mentors. During their training, student mentors learned from Dune Doctors and Gulf State Park naturalists how to install dune-building vegetation. Students were trained by Reetz, Dune Doctors CEO Frederique Beroset, who earned his MBA and MS in biology, and Cory Powell, a park naturalist with Gulf State Park.

By the time the training day was over, each mentor had planted 15 trees.

"As a school district, we have a focus on sustainability. It's really part of our

• They get the sense of ownership of where we live and how this beautiful place will not always be here if we don't take care of it."

core values and purpose, so at all three schools we have different initiatives happening related to sustainability," said Jessica Sampley, Career Tech coordinator with Gulf Shores City Schools. "What we've really seen for students involved in this is that they get the sense of ownership of where we live and how this beautiful place will not always be here if we don't take care of it. It's important to them. They talk about it. It's something I feel is so important, and they're learning the science behind it and connecting it to the curriculum."

On Feb. 23, the P4P Mentors went from students to teachers. Throughout the day, 146 fifth-graders were brought to the beach during two sessions. The Mentors and elementary students divided up into three teams. Each team was given 10-15 minutes with Powell, Beroset and Reetz to learn about native animals, native coastal plants and dune development.

Then it was time to get to work.

Each Mentor teamed up with two elementary students. They taught their new students how to dig and plant the trees to create the new dunes.

"By planting sea oats, kids develop a sense of ownership over the dune eco-







system and join our efforts in protecting our fragile coastal environment," Beroset said.

Before the event, Gulf Shores High School teachers provided a lecture series on the native coastal landscape and ecotourism industry in Gulf Shores. Students learned the importance of preserving and protecting the coastal ecosystem. The native species the students planted will accelerate the development of new coastal dunes, ensuring the protection of the local ecosystem and enforcing our first line of defense against storm surge.

"I really enjoyed this because I've never done anything like this before," said Lilly Reeves, a senior at Gulf Shores High. "I think it was a good thing to do because I'm not in any type of horticultural classes or anything. I think it's a good way of showing the other kids who aren't as interested in this what you can do with your community. Who would have thought that old Christmas trees help restore our sand dunes? I think it's actually amazing to teach fifth-graders because they're growing up in this community. I'm a senior. I'm going to be gone soon, but they're going to carry on the preservation."

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TEXAS FAJITA QUESADILLA Grilled steak*, chicken and shrimp with sautéed onions and peppers served inside a flour tortilla with melted cheese 12 9

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VEGETARIAN

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SPINACH AND MUSHROON GUESADILLA Flour tortilla stuffed with melted cheese, sautéed spinach and mushrooms with sour cream, lettuce and tomatoes served or

CACTUS VEGGIE BURRITO Seasoned mixed veggies wrapped in a large flour tortilla, topped with sour cream and avocado. Served with your choice of two (2): Mexican rice, black beans, Cactus grits or refried beans. 11,99

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IEW! BOOM-BOOM Shrimp tacos

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TWO TACOS 13.49

THREE TACOS 15.49

SHRIMP + GRITS

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SOPAPILLA 2.99 With ice cream 4.79

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choice of two sides all rolled into one

large flour tortilla topped with cheese dip, avocados, sour cream and your

Large flour tortilla stuffed with grilled

steak*, chicken, shrimp, grilled onions and bell peppers. Covered in our cheese dip and salsa. 14.99

grits mixed with our seasoned

CANTINA STYLE: Tossed in Boom

cilantro-lime cabbage. TRADITIONAL STYLE: Topped with

lettuce, pico de gallo and honey

habanero sauce. Served with your choice of two sides.

A sizzling platter of bell peppers and onions with your choice of meat. All fajitas are served with lettuce, picc de gallo, sour cream, guacamole and choice of two (2) sides: Mexican rice, black beans, cactus grits or refried beans.

_

A grilled half pineapple stuffed with chicken, sautéed bell peppers and onion.

TEXAS FAJITAS

A sizzling platter of bell peppers and onions with grilled steak*, chicken and shrimp. 15.99

SHRIMP DIABLD

Grilled shrimp cooked with our spicy cheese sauce served with two sides, 13,99

GRILLED SHRIMP TACOS

TRADITIONAL STYLE: Topped with lettuce, pico de gallo, an avocado slice and our honey habanero sauce. CANTINA STYLE: Tossed in Boom Boom sauce and topped with pineapple black bean pico, cilantro-lime cabbage. TWO TACOS 12.49 THREE TACOS 14.49

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CACTUS GRILLED BURRITO

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ARROZ CON FOLLO Grilled chicken served on a bed of rice topped with cheese dip. 9.99

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Chicken or beef taco served with

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Mexican rice, beans, Cactus grits

your choice of two (2): Mexican

refried beans, 5.99

ENCHILADA MEAL

or fries. 5.99

ТАСП

TEXAS TACOS One steak* taco, one grilled chicken taco, one shrimp taco served with pico de gallo, lettuce and cheese. 14.99

TACOS NEXICANOS Authentic Mexican-style street tac with came asada, fresh cilantro and onion on soft corn tortillas. Served with lime and verde sauce. TWO TACOS 12.49

NEWI CARNITAS TACOS Authentic slow-roasted pork on soft corn tortillas with cilantro ai raw onion, and a side of cilantro-li cabbage and salsa verde. TWO TACOS 11.99 THREE TACOS 12.49

CACTUS TACOS Seasoned ground beef or shredded chicken tacos with fresh pico de gallo, lettuce and cheese. TWO TACOS 11.49 THREE TACOS 12.49

TACOS DE POLLO Juicy grilled chicken tacos with fresh pico de gallo, lettuce and cheese. TWO TACOS 12.99 THREE TACOS 13.99

STEAK TACIDS Grilled marinated steak* tacos with pico de gallo, lettuce and cheese. TWO TACOS 13.99 THREE TACOS 15.49

TRADITION

CARNITAS ur choice of two (2): mexicar e, black or refried beans or

Slow-simmered pork tips cooked with sautéed onions. Served with fresh tortillas, lettuce, guacamole, pico de gallo and sour cream. 14.4

Three flour tortillas fried with your choice of shredded chicken, carnitas, or ground beef. Served with pico de gallo, lettuce, sour cream, and a side of cheese dip. 12.99 CARNE ASADA A grilled 9-oz skirt steak served on a sizzling bed of onions and bell peppers 15.49

TAQUITOS

TAULI TUD Three corn tortillas fried with your choice of shredded chicken, carnitas, or ground beef. Served with pico de gallo, lettuce, sour cream and cheese dip. 12.99 All bowls are served with Mexican rice, black beans, broccoli, pico de gallo, and choice of guacamole or sour cream. GRILLED CHICKEN 10.99

CHIMICHANGA PLATE A large flour tortilla stuffed with beef or shredded chicken, then

lightly fried and topped with cheese dip.11.99 Add steak* or grilled chicken +1.99

COMBOS

All combos are served with your choice of two sides: Mexican rice, black or refried beans or Cactus grits. Additional charges for steak grilled chicken or shrimp. BURRITO - CHILE RELLENO CO - CHALUPA - TOSTADA

ANY ONE 9.49 ENCHILADA SUPRENE ANY TWO 10.99 ANY THREE 12.99 One shredded chicken, one beef and one cheese enchilada topped with lettuce, tomato and sour

d in hel

MINI NACHOS

Choice of ground beef, shredded chicken or plain with cheese dip. 5.9

MINI QUESADILLAS

Kid-sized quesadillas stuffed with beef and served with your choice Cactus grits or fries. 5.99

CACTUS MINI BURRITO

Beef or shredded chicken burrito served with your choice of two (2) Mexican rice, beans, Cactus grits

CACTUS FINGERS

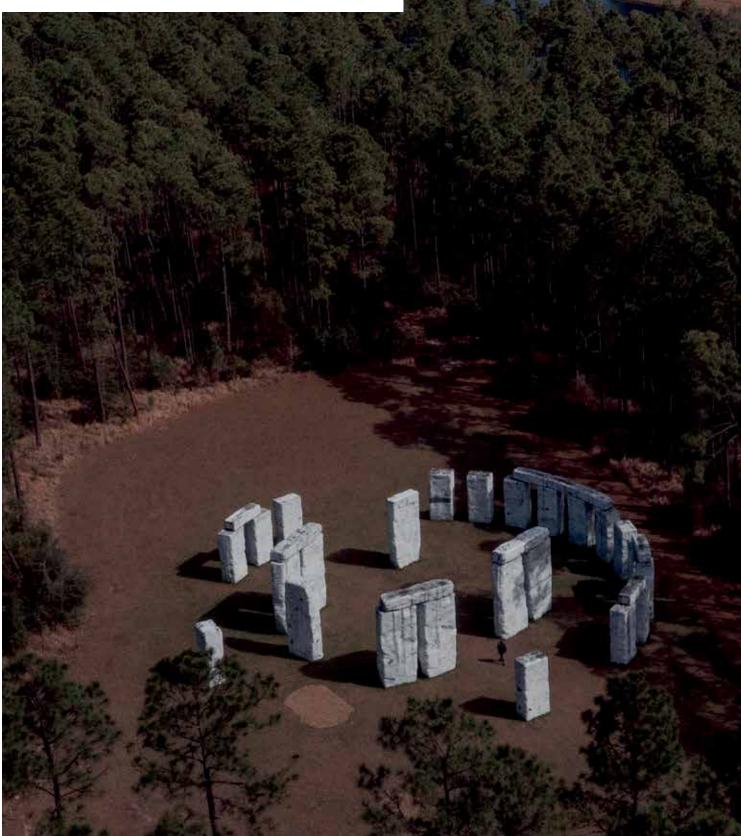
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LEMONADE | ORANGE FANTA MELLO YELLO COFFEE

THIS WASN'T IN THE BROCHURE!

Our first in a series exploring nearby places off the beaten path.



Bamahenge

Words by Allison Marlow Photo by Micah Green

ure, you've seen the beaches, the mini golf courses and more versions of the Gulf Coast's famed bushwacker than you can sip in a single week.

But have you seen Bamahenge? No? Let us take you on a little journey off the beaten path.

As you steer away from the coast and into the pine-filled woods that dot the nearby town of Elberta, head down the lonely, winding road toward Barber Marina.

There, peaking through the green of the forest, sits Bamahenge — a full-size replica of the ancient site in England.

Stand next to them and look up. The giant stone-like structures stand 21 feet tall.

Tap them. Thunk. Thunk. They look like stone but are fiberglass.

Go ahead, push on them. They are anchored into the ground with concrete and telephone poles. Only a strong hurricane could rip them away.

At 104 feet across, the structure is scaled identically to the original in England. It is even correctly aligned with the summer solstice.

But unlike the ancient landmark that begs the questions of who and how, Bamahenge has an origin story that starts with a vision of a much earlier time.

If you continue down the road past Bamahenge, eyes will begin to follow you. Soon you will notice dinosaurs lurking in the woods near the road.

George Barber, the owner of Barber Marina, had the creatures installed along the roadway in the early 2000s by Mark Cline, an artist who is best known for creating foam and fiberglass characters for movies and imagination powerhouses such as Disney

When Cline was at the site tending to one of the creatures, Barber asked him to build Stonehenge. Rather, as the story goes, he whispered a single word to Cline.

"Stonehenge." The monoliths raised from the ground in 2012 creating not just a des-tination but a myth in the making. Bamahenge. Don't miss it, or your friends will never believe you.



TO FIND BAMAHENGE, take U.S. Hwy 98 about 8 miles outside of Foley toward Elberta. Turn onto County Road 95. Continue for 5 miles, then turn right onto Fish Trap Road. Continue until you see the sign for Barber Marina and turn left at the sign. Go 1 mile, and you will see Bamahenge on the right in the trees. Park alongside the road. The walk is roughly 200 yards into the woods.

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great drink

BEST OF BALDWIN 2022

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YSTER

SINCE 1983

Behold, the salted caramel bushwacker

Doc's Seafood Shack & Oyster Bar has a new take on a Gulf Coast tradition. Plus, Beachin's Bushwacker Guide to the Island

Words by Kayla Green | Photos by Micah Green

A s the name implies, Doc's Seafood Shack & Oyster Bar in Orange Beach is known for its seafood. It's been cooking up fried, blackened, broiled, grilled and sauteed meals since 1984, filling bellies with seafood platters, oysters, royal red shrimp, crab, wings, chicken fingers, onion rings, hush puppies, coleslaw, draft beer and their flagship fried shrimp. Now, they've added something new, and it's flying off the shelves...or out of the machine.

Doc's premiered its salted caramel bushwhacker earlier this year.

Jennifer Harper didn't follow the concept to not fix something if it isn't broken when she developed the flavor brand new to the island. If it's good, make it better. Then drink it up.

"It's been a hit," Harper said. "It's my favorite bushwacker now."

The flip-flop-friendly eatery is where locals go, but Harper also has had a group make the 3.5-hour drive from Selma multiple times just to slurp her new salty, sweet beverage down. They've brought a different group of friends each time.

Others have come just to drink. Nix the seafood.

That's unusual for Doc's, Harper said. They're among 700 salted caramel bushwackers sold in the first eight weeks of it being on the menu. And that's eight weeks during snowbird season.

Giving tradition a run for its sweet, delicious money.

Harper has been at Doc's for a while, but the creamy alcoholic beverage iconic to the Gulf Coast hasn't, let along the new flavor. She's been general manager for two years now, moving her way up over 15 years from bartender to server to...bushwacker test kitchen.

They tried a king cake bushwhacker recipe, among other ideas.

Nothing stuck.

What did stick is the addition of Blue Chair Bay's vanilla rum to the bushwacker recipe, which normally features tastes of coffee, coconut, cream and chocolate. Also sticky and completely necessary is the gooey, drippy, sugary-coated caramel rim. It's all topped with a pinch of salt. A perfect balance to usher the next sip.

It's lighter than a traditional chocolate-based bushwacker. They're all generally refreshing, but there's something more to this choice than just its novelty.

A key might lie in the ingredients. They're real. The rum is smooth. The vanilla ice cream is from a tub. The cream of coconut – a marked difference than the traditional cream de cacao – doesn't cut corners.

"It does make it a little more expensive to use the real stuff," Harper said, "but it's worth it."



•••

If you've spent one day or your whole life in Alabama's Gulf Coast beach community, you've probably seen one drink's noted popularity. The bushwacker. It's a boozy milkshake that traditionally includes some combination of vanilla ice cream, milk, cream do cacao, rum, coffee and amaretto liqueur. Variations often introduce coconut, chocolate sauce and the ever-present option to add a rum floater. Better yet, a peanut butter whiskey floater.

Is there a best bushwacker? That's a pretty daring question to ask and an even more daunting hypothesis to test. Without being willing to gain a handful of pounds and subject my lactose-sensitive digestive system to, you know, unpleasantry, I'm in this exploration for the long haul. Why rush to learn everything now?

I also believe food is entirely subjective. Just ask my husband and me about the objective goodness of tofu, and you'll get two vastly different – yet correct to us – answers.

So here's a few of the better bushwackers either I, friends, coworkers or readers of Gulf Coast Media enjoy. When you're making your own judgements, think about important factors such as whether the base is liquidy or more like a milkshake, how sweet is, how large, the overarching flavors, the presence of alcohol in the taste, its presentation and restaurant atmosphere.

This is neither scientific nor inclusive of every bushwacker on the island. Whether you're new to the area, just visiting or searching for something new, I hope this helps you plan your next friends night out or family gathering. Maybe it'll prompt a new experience or a fun way to look at a drink standard to the area. Whatever the outcome, may it be had over a cheers with good company.

THE STEADFAST

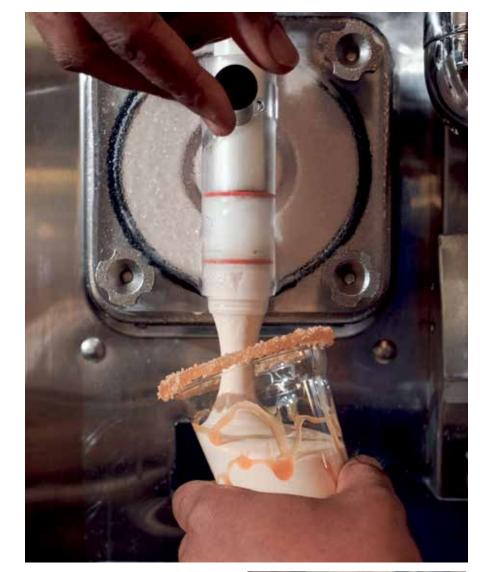
While the bushwacker originated in the U.S. Virgin Islands, The Sandshaker in Pensacola, Florida, popularized it stateside. From there, Flora-Bama helped make it an iconic choice for those 21 and older just along the state line.

The famous bar's take on the traditional recipe is reliably delicious. Its simplicity is complimented by the array of locations within Flora-Bama where you can enjoy it. Order from the satellite bar and drink one while playing in the silky white sand. Enjoy beach views from an outdoor bar, or rock out to live music at a number of indoor stages. Once you try it and fall in love, don't even think about asking for the recipe. It's a secret. You'll just have to go back for another.

THE SPECIALTY

Arrive hungry. Leavy happy. Enjoy your time while you're there.

Lucy Buffett's Lulu's is at the intra-coastal waterway in Gulf Shores and offers spacious seating, great views and a menu that has nothing bad. This bushwacker is presented nicely and tastes chocolatey with a special



mixture of Cruzan coconut rum, coffee liqueur, vanilla ice cream and a rum floater. A great place to bring the whole family.

THE ACCESSIBLE

If you're thinking waterfront dining and drinking, put Tacky Jacks at the top of your list. There are three locations on the island (Orange Beach, Gulf Shores and Fort Morgan), and they're all on the water. Arrive by pavement or via boat. Say yes to the floater. It's milky and smooth, a perfect middle-ground between melty and thick.

THE DARK HORSE

Their menu changes, so call ahead or check out their menu online, but the bushwacker at Playa at Sportsman Arena in Orange Beach is to be relished. This coconutty version is served in a clear tiki glass and sipped waterside. A topping of toasted coconut flakes makes it classy and adds texture. Come for a date night or happy hour with friends. The restaurant is in the same family as Fisher's. Speaking of that, just go get SallyWackered at Fisher's Dockside at Orange Beach Marina.



A combination of a bushwacker made with white rum, coconut rum, coconut milk and evaporated milk and a Sally made with light rum, dark rum, passion fruit and grenadine. Yes, please.

THE YEAR-ROUND

Always popular. For good reason.

The bushwacker at Cobalt, the Restaurant is easy drinking. Nestled under the Perdido Bay Bridge, parking for boats and vehicles is offered, and guests can sit inside a sprawling floorplan or on the deck. Live music is often a focal point outside. Whether you come for lunch, happy hour, an early bird dinner or to relax under a waterfront sunset, a bushwacker will be decorated with chocolate sauce and filled with hand-scooped vanilla bean ice cream and, if you want, a Cruzan 151 rum or Skrewball Peanut butter whiskey floater for \$3.

GULF COAST MEDIA'S Best of Baldwin 2022

Top bushwackers at the beach:

- Pirates Cove Marina & Restaurant WINNER
- Anchor Bar and Grill
- Bahama Bob's
- Perdido Beach Resort
- Tacky Jacks

Top bushwackers on the Eastern Shore:

- Moe's Original BBQ WINNER
- Boudreaux's Cajun Grill
- ED's Seafood Shed
- Fairhope Yacht Club
- The Bone and Barrel

* Best of Baldwin is an annual readers choice contest facilitated by Gulf Coast Media. To learn more, go to www.GulfCoastMedia.com/BestOf2022.



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What it takes

Words by Allison Marlow Photos by Micah Green

Orange Beach lifeguards do much more than oversee family vacations. They save lives regularly, and their training reflects that rigor.

he waters swirling and foaming along Alabama's Gulf Coast are some of the most beautiful as they crash onto the sugar-white sand beaches.

They are also some of the most dangerous.

Rip currents dance under those waves, peaking in and out of sight from normal swimmers. The frothy, white sprays are the most fun to dive into, but they are also most likely to carry swim-mers far from shore and into danger. During the height of the summer

months, Orange Beach's lifeguards make 10-15 rescues each week. That's 10-15 times they actually pluck a swim-mer from a life-or-death moment.

To keep Alabama's beaches safe. coastline cities only allow the best of the best to patrol their sand. Every March, dozens of hopefuls endure what officials call a 40-hour job interview to take their place among the lifeguard ranks. Last month, the first few minutes of

that process required them to dive into the chilly Gulf to complete the first task in lifeguard selection: a 500-meter swim in 10 minutes or less.

The ranks were thinned immediately. Brett Lesinger, beach safety division chief, said the timed swim is one of the toughest components of training, but the tasks didn't get much easier.

The next sessions would test the candidates' physical fitness, ability and mental knowledge and toughness. After two weekends, 40 hours working on land, in a pool and in the

Gulf, many would earn the title: Orange Beach Surf Rescue lifeguard.



Before a lifeguard can patrol Orange Beach's waterfront, they must complete 40 hours of training. Even returning guards must revisit the classroom for continued training and education. Upon their third season, they receive a coveted lifeguard jacket as a gift from the city. **"They've already been through and seen a lot of things,"** said Brett Lesinger, Beach Safety division chief. **"We try to continue to develop their skills and provide more training, but they're a pretty finished product at that point."**

4 days. **40** hours. Initial training duration





During the four days, and 40 hours of training, lifeguard candidates spend roughly five hours a day in the water, regardless of weather. Lesinger said the water this year wasn't super cold, but the wind was kicking up overhead and **"by the time we were running drills for three hours in and out of the water, you could see it was definitely grinding."**

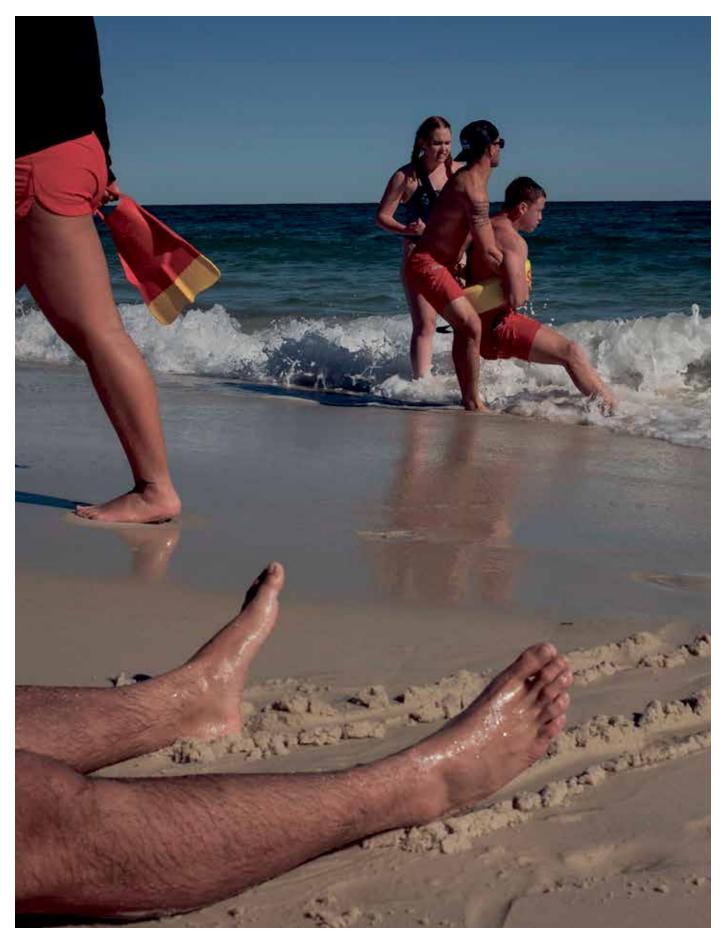
500 meters Swim must be completed on first training day

Completing the 500-meter swim in less than 10 minutes on the first day moves candidates to the next round. Then they must swim 25 yards underwater continually, surface dive 10 feet down and retrieve a 10-pound brick and tread water for 2 minutes without pausing.





Swimming is important, but so is strength. Lesinger said nearly every candidate and lifeguard on staff has an athletic background. During the tryout drills, those skills are put to the test. Each candidate is required to **run 1 mile in the sand in less than 10 minutes**, drag a "victim" from ankle deep water to dry sand, carry a rescue board into the water and paddle 100 yards out, **retrieve an unconscious "victim" 100 yards out and help carry a "victim" on a backboard for 50 yards.**



12-14 lifeguards on the beach by **May 1**

During the winter months, the number of lifeguards on Orange Beach's sands lessens as beachgoers head back to work and school. By May 1, 12-14 lifeguards will work along the surf at all times. Lesinger said eight Gulf Shores firefighters also serve as lifeguards.





Out of the water, the candidates must learn and know hand signals, flag systems, CPR, beach topography and weather and be able to identify local marine life.

Hand signals, CPR, flag systems, weather systems beach topography, local marine life identification



The tough conditions the candidates face give Lesinger a glimpse at how they will react to tough conditions on the job. "We like to see their attitude," he said. "Do you get grouchy after an hour of working hard? That's what it's going to be like on the beach. It's a long, hectic, hot day talking and interacting with a lot of people. At the end of the day, are you in a good mood or are you going to be short and not want to talk to anybody?"

HAVE YOU SEEN FRED?

Words by Kayla Green

It's a bird? Yep. It's a plane? Nope. It's Fred.

WHO?

The name is commonly used – seemingly most often by tourists and annual vacationers – to dub Great Blue Herons on social media. Gulf Shores & Orange Beach Tourism can post a photo of "a Fred" standing stoically in front of a color-blasted sunset and get responses laden with exclamation points and photos of their own Fred sightings, though sometimes a Kevin or a Hank pops up. A cousin or crazy uncle, maybe.

But here's the thing. It's not quite clear where the social media nickname originated.

Tourism employees know the name and use it online. One even has a Fred visit the canal behind her home almost every morning. Gulf State Park employees are stumped, too.

Kelly Reetz, a natural resource planner at the park, did some digging. She found a Pinterest post of a photo of a Great Blue Heron that the photographer called Fred. Then she found a 500-piece puzzle of the bird holding a fish. The title: "Great Blue Heron – Just Fred." She even found a post from Western College of Veterinary Medicine in Saskatchewan, Canada, from 2016 of a Great Blue Heron with a broken wing that the clinicians dubbed Fred.

So the island legend stands. While we may not know the origins of the nickname, there is plenty more to know about the beautiful birds. The following information was provided by Gulf State Park.

Great Blue Herons – Ardea herodian.

HABITAT

In the state park, Great Blue Herons can be found in both freshwater and saltwater habitats. Find them stalking fish, frogs, snakes and small mammals around the edges of Lake Shelby, Middle Lake and along the ditches in the campground and picnic area. In the evenings and early mornings, catch sight of them foraging along the beach shoreline. Sometimes they will even sneak up on unaware fishermen and steal bait or the day's catch right out of open buckets or ice chests.

They are also frequent visitors to the Gulf State Park Pier. The state park encourages guests to keep their distance and to not feed the birds, but that doesn't stop the Freds from stealing a snack or attempting to snatch bait right off the hook. Most of the time on the pier, though, they will simply pose on the railing for photos but fly away if approached. That's the way the park prefers it.

POPULATION

Great Blue Herons are found throughout the park, Gulf Shores and Orange Beach year-round. They nest in colonies called rookeries in trees in early spring, and their eggs hatch in less than a month. After two to three months, the young leave the nest and begin to fend for themselves.

Their notable features include a large yellow-orange bill, short black plumes on their head and a black and chestnut pattern on their shoulders. Younger birds are more brownish than adults and have a dark crown. More than 57,000 observations have been notched on eBird.org.

SIGHTINGS

If you're visiting the area and want to spot Fred, you're in luck. Great Blue Herons can be spotted in the area all year long. They are most often seen early in the morning or late in the evening.

THREATS

Fred is old. Like, prehistoric predator old.

Reetz said very few of the birds fall prey to traditional predators, such as bobcats or coyotes, but because they do encounter fishermen and are often fed, they lose their fear of humans and often beg for a free meal. En route, they can get tangled in fishing line. Sometimes the line gets caught and wrapped around their wings, neck or even their beak, preventing the bird from being able to catch and eat food. Great Blue Herons are very fast and difficult to catch, even when they cannot fly. Unless they are caught and the fishing line removed, they will die a very slow death from starvation.

Hatchlings are often predated by alligators that hang out under the nests and wait for the babies to fall while they are learning to fly.

BENEFITS

Great Blue Herons are a natural part of the ecosystem at Gulf State Park and play an important role in the area beyond making beautiful photos for social media. Because they depend on the wetlands for food and nesting sites, they can be considered an indicator species, serving as a measure of the environmental conditions of their habitat in the wetlands.

They are vulnerable to habitat loss and impacts caused by hu-

mans. As their habitat becomes increasingly disturbed by traffic, pollution and development, the birds will begin to disappear from our wetlands and beaches. Reetz recalled an example: after the oil spill in 2010 and the increase of chemical pollutants in the water, many of the herons left to find food in safer waters. They didn't return until well after the oil was cleaned up and the water quality improved.

Another benefit many will appreciate is they eat snakes.

"I personally love snakes and enjoy seeing them and teaching about them," Reetz said. "However, I acknowledge that not everyone likes snakes and may find comfort in knowing that Great Blue Herons won't hesitate to gulp down a venomous cottonmouth."

To learn more about the Great Blue Heron and array of other birds that call Gulf State Park Home, go to www.alapark.com/ parks/gulf-state-park/birding.

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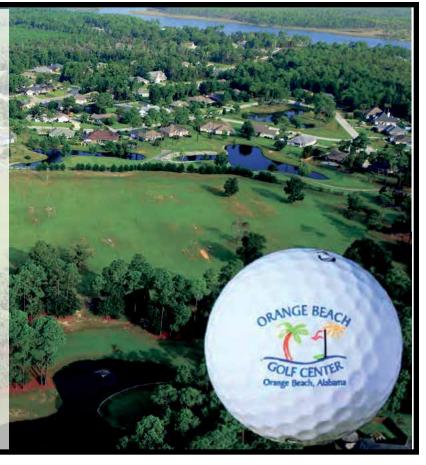
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Lunch Menu

HOME-STYLE LUNCH SPECIALS (Served with your choice of two side dishes)

Fried Shrimp - tail less Blackened Catfish Fried Catfish Broiled Flounder Fried Flounder Grilled Chicken Chicken Creole Fried Chicken Tenders Country Fried Steak Hamburger Steak Pork Chops Country Ham Vegetable Plate

SANDWICHES

(Served with french fries) Complimentary Ice Tea and Bread Served with All Dine in Lunch Entrees. Add House or Substitute Salad for side dish Po-Boy Sandwich Cheeseburger Crab Cake Po-Boy *Monte Cristo Sandwich

Dinner Menu

STARTERS

Oysters on the Half Shell 1/2 dozen1 dozen Southern Style Crab Cakes Crab, Spinach & Artichoke Dip Coconut Shrimp Stuffed Mushrooms Alligator Bites Fried Crab Claws 1/2 lb

Tuna Dip Sweet Potato French Fry Basket Fried Green Tomatoes GUMBO & SOUP Seafood Gumbo

Crab & Shrimp Bisque

1

1 lb

cup

bowl

cup

bowl

FRIED SEAFOOD FAVORITES

(Served with your choice of two side dishes) Butterfly Shrimp Tail-less Shrimp Bon Secour Oysters Crab Claws Fried Fish of the Day Shrimp & Flounder Shrimp & Oysters Fried Catfish

SALADS

Dressings: Honey-Mustard, Ranch, Bleu Cheese, Italian, Thousand Island, French, Low-Fat Ranch, Raspberry Vinaigrette, Balsamic Vinegar, Balsamic Vinaigrette, Sesame Asian, Oil & Vinegar Riviera Salad

- with pecan chicken tenders
- with chicken tenders
- with boiled shrimp

- with grilled or blackened chicken Caesar Salad

- w/grilled or blackened chicken

- w/boiled shrimp Gumbo & Salad - a cup of Seafood Gumbo and our

Bisque & Salad

SEAFOOD FAVORITES

(Served with your choice of two side dishes) Add House or Caesar Salad Substitute Salad for side dish Fried Butterfly Shrimp Fried Oysters Fried Crab Claws *Coconut Shrimp Grilled Shrimp Fried Seafood Platter

SEAFOOD PLATTERS

(Served with your choice of two side dishes) Shrimp Lover's Platter Fried Seafood Platter Broiled Seafood Platter Creole Platter Caribbean Platter Crab Platter SEAFOOD SPECIALTIES (Served with your choice of two side dishes)

Stuffed Shrimp Shrimp Scampi Blackened Catfish Coconut Shrimp Grilled Shrimp Shrimp Creole Crawfish Etoufee Crab Cake Dinner STEAMED SEAFOOD

(Served with new potatoes & one side) Snow Crab Legs - 2 lbs. Royal Red Shrimp - 1 lb. Combo - 1/2 pound Royal Reds & 1 pound Snow Crab

TONIGHT'S CATCH

(Served with your choice of two side dishes) Choose from the following preparation styles: Fried Catch Blackened Catch Grilled Catch Broiled Catch Broiled Seafood Platter Stuffed Shrimp Mahi-Mahi Yellow-Fin Tuna Tilapia Grouper Snow Crab Legs Royal Reds - 3/4 lb. Combo - 1/2 lb. Each Crab Cakes - 2 cakes

Fettuccini Alfredo

- w\grilled or blackened chicken
- with shrimp or crawfish
- Basil Pesto Pasta
 - with Roma Tomatoes
 - with grilled chicken
 - with shrimp

SIDE DISHES

Fried Green Tomatoes ~ Green Beans Turnip Greens ~Sweet Potato Casserole Com Fritters ~ French Fries Mashed Potatoes w/Gravy ~ Fried Okra Au Gratin Potatoes ~ Steamed Veggies Kernel Corn ~ Yellow Rice Black-Eyed Peas ~ Cole Slaw Lima Beans ~ Macaroni & Cheese

New Orleans Catch Mediterranean Catch Caribbean Catch *Pecan Encrusted Catch *Paneed Catch

LAND LOVER'S FARE

(Served with your choice of two side dishes) Hawaiian Rib-eye - (12 oz.) - add jumbo grilled or fried shrimp Jamaica-Jerk Chicken Grilled Chicken Breasts Fried Chicken Tenders

PASTA

Fettuccini Alfredo - with grilled or blackened chicken - with shrimp or crawfish Scallops Alfredo Shrimp & Pasta Marsala Basil-Pesto Pasta - with grilled chicken - with shrimp

SIDE DISHES

Substitute House or Caesar Salad for a Side Dish Sweet Potato Casserole ~ Cole Slaw Baked Potato ~ Steamed Vegetables Yellow Rice ~ French Fries Fried Green Tomatoes

A preview of the NCAA National Championship in Gulf Shores, May 4-

abour

Photos by Micah Green

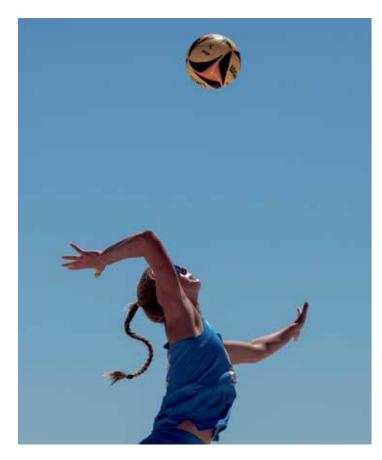
ight nationally ranked college volleyball teams descended on the beach in front of The Hangout in March as the University of Alabama Birmingham hosted its fourth-annual March to May Tournament. Along with the Blazers, No. 1 UCLA, No. 4 Florida State, No. 5 LSU, No. 7 Grand Canyon, No. 11 Florida Atlantic, No. 13 Georgia State, No. 15 South Carolina and No. 20 Tulane also played matches. The tournament was meant to be a preview of the NCAA national championship that will come back to The Hangout in May. For more information on tickets, visit www.ncaatickets.com.

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The Basics

BREAKFAST BOWL | 8 gouda grits topped with hash browns, a fried egg & crumbled bacon

BREAKFAST BUDDY | 8 fried egg with cheese and choice of bacon, sausage or ham on toasted English muffin. Comes with grits or hashbrowns

ALL AMERICAN | 12 two eggs any style, bacon, sausage or ham, grits or hash browns with toast

BISCUITS, GRAVY & EGGS | 11 two biscuits topped with two fried eggs covered with sausage gravy

BREAKFAST BURRITO | 8 scrambled egg, sausage or bacon & cheddar cheese comes with grits or hashbrowns



Sweets

choice of bacon. sausage or ham

FRENCH TOAST | 10

Pancakes

 BLUEBERRY
 12
 CHOCOLATE CHIP
 12

 BANANA PECAN
 12
 PLAIN
 10

Benedicts

served with grits or hashbrowns

CHICKEN FLORENTINE | 16 fried chicken, sautéed spinach and basil, poached eggs, hollandaise sauce on a toasted English muffin

VEGGIE | 15 fresh spinach, portabella mushroom, sliced tomatoes, poached eggs, hollandaise sauce, fresh herbs on a toasted English muffin

CAJUN | 16 conecuh sausage, 2 poached eggs, on an english muffin, topped with crawfish queso



Sandwiches

served with slaw and choice french fries, sweet potato fries, chips, and onion rings

HAMBURGER | 14 8oz patty, choice of cheese, on a buttered toasted bun

TERIYAKI CHICKEN BREAST | 14 bacon & swiss cheese on a toasted ciabatta roll dressed & served with honey mustard sauce

BUFFALO CHICKEN | 14 fried chicken tenders coated with a spicy buffalo sauce. Served dressed on a toasted bun with a rancho bleu or swiss cheese dressing

REUBEN | 14 corn beef, swiss cheese, sauerkraut & thousand island dressing on grilled rye

TURKEY FLATBREAD | 14 turkey, swiss, spinach with a pesto sauce

SHRIMP POBOY OR WRAP | 15 remoulade sauce, dressed on a warm cuban hogie

MAHI POBOY OR WRAP | 16 fried, grilled or blackened

Platters

SHRIMP PLATTER OR FISH PLATTER | 16 grilled, fried or blackened, corn fritters, coleslaw & choice of side

CHICKEN TENDERS PLATTER | 14

SEAFOOD COMBO | 19 mahi, shrimp, grilled, fried or blackened with choice of side

Salads

Choice of Ranch, Caesar, Bleu Cheese, Italian, Honey Mustard, Apple Cider Vinaigrette & Balsamic Vinaigrette

CRAISIN SALAD | 9

Mixed Greens with Sugar Coated Walnuts, Goat Cheese, & Craisins Served with an Apple Cider Vinaigrette. Add Chicken Or Shrimp \$6

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