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## Restaurant competition heats up

With more businesses than ever, resort area eateries are battling

*By Alex Ruoff  
Staff Writer*

REHOBOTH BEACH -- As summer approaches and crowds descend on the area's resort towns, local restaurants and eateries are vying for attention. But getting it isn't always easy, or fair.



Chef Felipe Ramalas Beranza, left, makes a wild mushroom brandy cream as Matthew Haley, owner of Lupo di Mare restaurant in Rehoboth Beach, prepares a slow-roasted pork bolognese. (John King photo)

According to administrators from Rehoboth Beach Main Street, a nonprofit group that advocates for city businesses, there are now more restaurants in Rehoboth and Dewey Beach than ever before, which has many battling for business.

"Rehoboth Beach has become known as the Restaurant Capital of Delaware," said Executive Director Fay Jacobs. "(The city's) culinary reputation has foodies from all over the East Coast coming here for the dining experience."

While every business owner wants to be unique and set their establishment apart from the hundreds of others, Jacobs said that isn't always easy as restaurants are bought and sold at a higher rate in resort towns.

"It's very competitive," said Regan Derrickson, owner of the Nalu, Ponos and Delfini's of Dewey Beach. "There used to be less restaurants and the community was small, but now so many are here and people have more choices."

Bill Lewis of Surf's Up, a sub shop in Bethany Beach, knows how competitive the restaurant industry can be. He said there has been more than one occasion where competitors have attempted to study, and steal, his creations.

"People have tried to replicate the style, but it's all about the ingredients," he said. "We get a lot of repeat business because what we have is good. But some places want that, too."

And it doesn't just stop with the ingredients. According to Derrickson, prices and daily specials are also duplicated.

Once one restaurant owner featured a \$5 sandwich on their lunch menu, he said other area establishments did the same.

"You don't see too many places that don't have a (reasonably priced) sandwich special," Derrickson said. "You definitely have to be doing whatever works and what brings people in."

Kevin Roberts, managing partner of Bethany Blues, said it's not uncommon for new restaurants to take cues from others in the area.

"People always say the best ideas are stolen," he said. "If you go somewhere and you like an idea, you take it back and say 'let's try it.' "

And there are certain items that are lifted more than others, said Kevin McCabe, owner of DB Fries in Bethany Beach.

"The beach is known for the fries, ice cream and burgers; you see a certain style here that people expect," he said.

Matt Haley owns SoDel Concepts, which includes Bluecoast in Bethany Beach, Catch 54 in Fenwick Island, Fish On! in Lewes, Northeast Seafood Kitchen in Ocean View and Lupo di Mare in Rehoboth Beach.

In the end, he said the restaurants that are able to provide great food at a reasonable price are the ones that will succeed.

"Since the beginning of the Discovery Channel and Food Network, people demand more from restaurants in terms of service and quality because they're exposed to more," he said. "They won't settle for less and they know what they want."

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