

# Back Porch opens at Pier Park

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## PANAMA CITY BEACH

Pier Park's ever-growing roster of restaurants expanded Monday, as a 600-seat eatery modeled after its Destin namesake opened in the Panama City Beach development's boardwalk section.

The two-story Back Porch, which features amberjack, grouper, fried shrimp and oysters, opened its doors with a morning ribbon cutting and lunch service for its patrons.

It joins other Pier Park eateries such as Longhorn Steakhouse, Hofbrau Beer Garden, Five Guys Burgers and Fries and Red Brick Pizza.

Southern Restaurant Group President/CEO John Comer said the Pier Park Back Porch had started out with brisk sales Monday and opened a little faster than expected.

"We're a week ahead of schedule. The contractor did a great job," Comer said.

Southern Restaurant Group owns Back Porch, which has been established as the Back Porch Seafood & Oyster House in Destin since 1979.

The company also owns Reggae J's Island Grill, located across from Back Porch at Pier Park's main Front Beach Road entrance. It is scheduled to open later this spring.

With Back Porch's opening Monday, Southern Restaurant Group operates 10 restaurants, Comer said.

Back Porch seats about 200 in its second floor, open-air bar and restaurant area, with a view of the Gulf of Mexico.

Comer said Back Porch employs about 175 people, with Reggae J's scheduled to hire about the same number of employees.

He said the restaurant offers fresh seafood and affordable family dining, with steaks and burgers complementing the business' seafood entrees.

The Destin Back Porch had attracted visitors from the Panama City area, and Comer said Southern Restaurant Group jumped at the chance to expand into this market.

He said the high number of restaurants opening at Pier Park represented good competition, and added he thought all of the eateries located by the water would do well.

"We've been dying to do the concept over here. Pier Park provided the perfect opportunity to take the concept to Panama City Beach," Comer said.



Terry Barner / The News Herald Outside diners had a clear view of the demolition of Pier Park's namesake pier during the opening day at Back Porch Seafood & Oyster House in Panama City Beach on Monday. The Dan Russell City Pier is scheduled to reopen in the summer of 2009.



Terry Barner / The News Herald Back Porch Seafood & Oyster House server Jenni Revell delivers an order for tourists Howard and Sharon Levin of Overland Park, Kan., on Monday during the opening day of the 600-seat restaurant at Pier Park in Panama City Beach.