

Harborwide Seafood Festival returning to its local roots — and it's free!

By Matt Algarin
850-654-8446
malgarin@thedestinlog.com

With less than six months until the 33rd annual Destin Seafood Festival, plans are starting to take shape as festival organizers work diligently to return the festival to its roots.

"Things are well under way," said Capt. Mike Eller of the Lady Em and the Destin Charter Boat Association. "Everything is going unbelievably well, and all of the property owners and major players are on board 100 percent."

After taking over the Destin tradition from the Chamber of Commerce in December of 2010, this year's version of the festival, which is sponsored by the Destin Charter Boat Association, will

stretch from HarborWalk Marina on the west down the harbor to the Boat House Oyster Bar on the east.

The theme for the festival is "Heritage on the Harbor."

"It's going to be great having the docks, the fishermen and their boats and the working harbor as the backdrop," Eller said. "It's going to be an awesome event ... just huge."

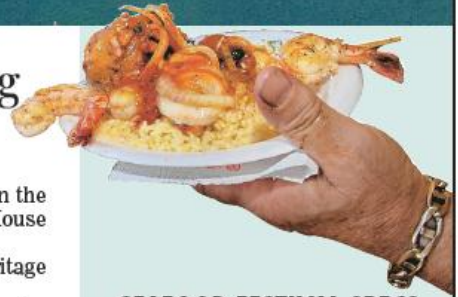
Event Coordinator Melissa Steffen told The Log recently that festival-goers should expect to see some dramatic changes from years past.

"We wanted to address some of the issues that came up in previous years, such as the admission costs and gates," she said. "There will be no admission charge

See **SEAFOOD A2**

SCOTT JACKSON, PHOTOSFLORIDA.COM | Special to The Log

WIDE OPEN: Above, this year's Seafood Festival will have an open feel, stretching from HarborWalk Village to the Boat House, without any gates.



SEAFOOD FESTIVAL SPECS

- **WHEN:** Sept. 30 through Oct. 2: 4-10 p.m. Friday, 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. Saturday and 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Sunday

- **MUSIC:** The event will feature two stages, with music from local artists such as Heritage, the Forrest Williams Band and Dread Clampitt.

- **KIDS:** This year's festival will boast three separate kid's areas, a petting zoo and more.

- **COST:** Admission is free.

INSIDE

There's a new seafood store coming to town, **Page C1**

...more...

SEAFOOD from page A1

for the festival, and people can go up and down the harbor as they please.”

Locals will have an option to purchase \$15 wristbands, which will provide them with discounts on food, drinks and T-shirts. Steffen has also “mixed things up” by bringing in new arts and crafts vendors, so people have something fresh to see this time around.

“Our other goal is to make sure that no matter where you are, whether you are an adult, child, teenager or grandparent, there is something to do,” Steffen told *The Log*. “There is going to be something for everyone.”

She said the focus is still going to be on making the festival a community event, which will feature arts, crafts, local entertainment and, of course, local seafood.

The festival also will return to its original time slot, coinciding with the beginning of the Destin Fishing Rodeo in October.

Despite having multiple stakeholders along the harbor, Steffen said the level of cooperation so far is something to be proud of because everyone is working toward a similar goal.

“We are sharing the same harbor here, and since the fishermen are the ones putting it on, they have a better idea of what works for them and what doesn’t,” she said. “People are very excited about what’s happening.”

Eller said the buzz surrounding this year’s festival is incredible.

“When the festival was on one property, it always had a lot of energy associated with it, but with it along the harbor, this will give it the true harbor walk feel,” he said. “This will be our first true festival where each property owner has stepped up to the plate and wanted to put together a unified festival — this is a new beginning.”