

Seahorse Grill takes a casual approach in Crescent Beach

BY GORD SCOTT
VANCOUVER SUN

A table full of locals was disappointed recently with their visit to the new Seahorse Grill in Crescent Beach — they thoroughly enjoyed themselves.

Mixed feelings of this type come with the territory in this tiny South Surrey beach community. While the future of this energetic bistro — open just a few months — looks good, nobody wants anything here to become *too* popular.

Especially not as *popular* as in (heaven forbid) White Rock.

John and Francina Kavanagh are quick to put these fears to rest, however, as they are seasoned veterans of the hectic Marine Drive restaurant strip in White Rock.

New Westminster-born and raised John Kavanagh and his wife owned Wolfie's — a Marine Drive fixture — for seven years.

The reason for move is simple.

"Lifestyle," John says.

"We're just so happy to be here," Francina adds.

While Wolfie's is well known for fine West Coast dining, the Seahorse Grill takes a more casual approach.

"Somewhere where you can dress up or down," John says. "We want to make this a neighbourhood gem."

That should suit the locals, who have known the building for decades as Chesnuts by the Sea under the rule of beach legend Mike, who could occasionally make the Soup Nazi look accommodating.

The Kavanaghs have opened up and renovated the kitchen, added a small bar, installed real washrooms and a very quiet patio out the back (the restaurant, by contrast, can be loud).

The quirky 1960's-basement-meets-English-family-antiques look has been dragged into the new millennium, but it's still funky.

John concedes there's a comfort-food spirit to the menu, but the execution and presentation of old favourites such as prime rib (on Sundays) lamb shank and even liver and onions are thoroughly up to date.

Meat dishes stand out, with the liver good enough to convert its most strenuous objectors.

There is a good selection of appetizers; pomme frites and mussels are offered in a number of interesting combinations.

Salads are dressed just right, with smart updates like diced pickled beet to the spinach version.

The kitchen's handling of wild salmon and a seafood salad pleased a demanding audience, and there is a good array of pastas and pizzas to round out the menu. Desserts here are actually created for *one* diner, and too good to share, anyway.

Entrees are in the \$17-20 range, appetizers from \$4-7, and desserts are \$6. The Seahorse is open for lunch and dinner daily except Tuesdays.



John and Francina Kavanagh, owner of Crescent Beach's Seahorse Grill, with goat cheese, repasted garlic pesto crostinis with infused oils.

PETER BATTISTONI/VANCOUVER SUN

Seahorse Grill

Overall ★★★★★

Food ★★★★★

Ambience ★★★ 1/2

Service ★★★★★

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12147 Sullivan St.

Crescent Beach, Surrey

604-542-6211

Open 6 days a week,
from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.
and 5 p.m. to 10 p.m.
Closed Tuesday.

*Restaurant visits are conducted anonymously and interviews are done by phone.
Restaurants are rated out of five stars.*

and the servers know their stuff. There are a few kinks to be worked out, of course, but everybody is being cheerful about it.

There are now almost a dozen restaurants in Crescent Beach, but John Kavanagh notices a difference from his former Marine Drive haunts.

and everybody knows everybody. When I first started I thought 'What is this, Coronation Street?'

Not quite, but it looks like the locals are going to have to make room for one more good eatery in their own little slice of heaven — as well as those the Seahorse is bound to attract from further