

Woody Collins

FOR MANY, WOODY COLLINS NEEDS NO INTRODUCTION. HOWEVER, IT MAY HELP JOG YOUR MEMORY IF WE REFER TO HIM BY HIS PROPER TITLE: CAPTAIN WOODY.



PEARL OF WISDOM The eastern oyster can make small pearls to surround particles that enter the shell. These pearls, however, are insignificant in size and have no value.

"The first time I came onto the island was in 1947," he said. "I was in kindergarten and came over with my uncle."

It would not be his last trip. The man whose name would one day grace restaurants in Hilton Head and Bluffton began his career on the water in Broad Creek when he bought his first boat. "I called it the 'Little Shell' after a girl I was dating at the time. You can get away with a lot if you name a boat after a woman."

During Collins' first visit to the island, Benny Hudson was still laying down the foundation of what would be his restaurant. By the time he was shrimping and oystering, Hudson's had become an island hotspot. "I kept seeing people drive up to the restaurant, wearing these bright colored pants and everything. I knew they were different," he said. It sparked inspiration in the young fisherman, and he soon opened his own fish market inside a vacant carwash at Coligny Plaza. He rented it on a handshake from Norris Richardson.

"I told Benny Hudson I was going to open a fish market on the south end and keep my boat here," Collins said. "Benny could be tough. I was kind of hesitant to tell him, but I told him. He just said, 'Woody, you'll do real good over there.'"

Eventually, Collins found himself selling off the docks at Palmetto Bay Marina ("We'd have so many people on the dock, their toes would be in the water.") John Rumsey, one of the marina's owners, broke the news to Collins that the marina was being sold and developed. He also offered to partner with him on a new seafood restaurant.

After several years, Collins would sell Captain Woody's, returning to his first love: the water.

"I had the oyster lease in Broad Creek," said Collins. "I started oystering some while I was shrimping, after the season was over. I always really liked oystering. I liked the guys I worked with and I learned a lot."

And while the name Captain Woody's is synonymous with shrimping and fishing, he's always held a fondness for our area's oysters, along with the oystermen who work our area's beds.

"Those local guys are the backbone of the oyster business," he said. "And the oyster business is an absolutely beautiful thing."