



Photos by KATE GLASS

Chef Jason Jones has been with the Blue Marlin Grille in Essex for nine years.

Blue Marlin Grille

Fine dining, and soon to feature a fish market

By JILL DIVER

Beyond the cluster of storefronts and restaurants in downtown Essex, just a little off the beaten path, seafood aficionados will be happy to find the Blue Marlin Grille.

Deep pine booths with tall backs line the walls, and large family style tables are placed in the middle of the spacious room that seats 120 people. A light wood trimmed black granite bar furnishes the other side of the space.

The Blue Marlin is the brainchild of owner Corey Matthews, who started cooking when he was 15 years old, opened his first restaurant at age 23, then opened the doors of the Blue

Marlin Grille in 1998.

He named it the Blue Marlin because he thinks that's a beautiful and powerful fish.

"We cater to families. People can come off the beach. You can come in here in flip-flops and sandals," Matthews, 39, said of his restaurant.

"You can get anything from spaghetti and meatballs to halibut."

According to Matthews, the Blue Marlin Grille is "casual and fun, but you get high-end quality food."

Customers can feel comfortable coming off the beach or coming in from a night out on the town to sit at the bar and have beer, wine, martinis or other libations. ➤

BLUE MARLIN GRILLE

- ▶ **Address:** 65 Eastern Ave., Essex.
- ▶ **Telephone:** 978-768-7400.
- ▶ **Hours:** Monday through Thursday, 11:30 a.m. to 9:30 p.m.; Friday and Saturday, 11:30 a.m. to 10 p.m.; Sunday, 11:30 a.m. to 9:30 p.m. Bar is open until 1 a.m. every day.
- ▶ **Parking:** Large lot directly outside the restaurant.



Dijon Encrusted Salmon with Asparagus is one of the many seafood dishes offered at the Blue Marlin.

Though the Blue Marlin is known for its seafood, the No. 1 selling item is steak tips.

“I think they’re popular because they are the best around,” Matthews said.

Kona Crusted Steak, a signature dish, is prepared with Kona coffee, cocoa and sugar. The mixture is rubbed on both sides of a steak, which is then broiled, creating a thin crust on top. It is served dripping with butter, with a side of loaded baked potato and creamed spinach.

“There’s nothing like the Kona Crusted Steak around here,” Matthews said. “In order to get that kind of quality meat, you have to go toward the city. It’s usually not cost effective for restaurants, but it’s a way to give back to people and bring people into the restaurant.”

Matthews emphasizes consistency in his meals. He and chef Jason Jones, who has been with the restaurant for nine years, are the only two who cook.

“Either Jason is cooking or I’m cooking. Jason and I have the same kind of taste buds. If I don’t like something, I don’t want to sell it,” he said. “(Jason) understands what I like. We’re right on the same page.”

Several seafood dishes are popular, too.

“We have a Chipotle Shrimp with Spinach, and Shrimp Ravioli with Roasted Corn, and a Dijon Encrusted Salmon with Asparagus,” Matthews said. “Our fish is fresh everyday.”

At the bar, guests can enjoy two new appetizers, Spicy Calamari and Spicy Shrimp.

“My chef was playing around for a dinner for himself and he tried the spicy shrimp and calamari,” Matthews said. “We ran them as a special and people

continued to ask for them, so we added them to the menu.”

In the beginning of May, Matthews began building the Blue Marlin Fish Market, an idea he has had for some time. He just had to wait for space to open up.

“This is going to be my little baby,” Matthews said.

Blue Marlin Fish Market will sell prepared foods like chicken pot pies and stuffed chicken. In the summer, there will be barbecued meats like marinated chicken, steak tips, shish kabobs and sides of coleslaw, potato and macaroni salads.

And, of course, it’s a fish market first. He plans to offer haddock, cod, shellfish and a raw bar. There will be prepared seafood meals, too.


“We’ll cut the fish and prepare it for you, put the fish in a casserole dish you can take home with the directions on how to cook it right on top,” Matthews said. “You also will get two sides to go with it.”

Customers will be able to sit down, have a drink, and eat the likes of lobster and crab rolls. For those headed to the beach, the fish market will create lunch to go in little cardboard pails.

For Matthews, having the fish market is just part of having a restaurant in a seaside town.

“There hasn’t been a fish market in a long time. It’s good for the town,” Matthews said.

When creating the menu for the Blue Marlin, Matthews wanted to make sure his restaurant catered to everyone.

The menu is \$26 and under. Kids under 12 eat free on Monday and Tuesday nights with the purchase of an entree. And from 3 to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday, half-price appetizers are offered. 

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