



## **St. Augustine Fish Camp aims to bring the restaurant's established brand to the Ancient City**

By Colleen Jones  
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The company that modernized the concept of the southern fish camp with a chain of locations across Northeast Florida is bringing its successful brand to St. Augustine.

The St. Augustine Fish Camp will be the seventh opening for the Southern Table Hospitality restaurant group first begun by chef proprietor Ben Groshell and his wife, Liza, with Marker 32 in Jacksonville Beach.

There, the Groshells refined the vision for their fish camp concept: fresh seafood in an upscale but not stuffy atmosphere featuring expansive water views. The Palm Valley Fish Camp launched in 2009, and since then has added two more locations, in North Beach and Julington Creek (Southern Table Hospitality's portfolio also includes Valley Smoke BBQ, Safe Harbor Seafood Jacksonville and Marker 32).

The St. Augustine location, just south of The Ice Plant and St. Augustine Distillery on Riberia Street, is expected to open in mid-January, according to Eric Williams, director of operations for Southern Table Hospitality.

Why was St. Augustine targeted for the expansion?

Well, for one, it's a coastal town, and for another, many of their current customers have been asking for it, Williams said.

"It was just a matter of finding a great water location," Williams said.

The restaurant will overlook the San Sebastian River and include a dock where guests can walk down and see shrimping boats, a reminder of this area's past and present maritime industry.

Of course, recreational boaters will be able to tie up and visit the restaurant, too, which hearkens back to the traditional Florida fish camp where you could spend a day out on the water and then grab a table in a rustic cabin serving fried fish platters and exotic local specialties like alligator and frog.

The menus at each of the Groshells' fish camp locations are nearly identical, featuring favorites like spicy seafood linguine and grilled mahi over creamy grits, as well as landlubber options like steak and pork chops. One of the best-sellers, Williams said, is the fish special of the day, which highlights the daily catch in a unique way.

"We like to keep it simple and fresh," Williams said.

Southern classics like pimento cheese spread, fried green tomatoes and pan-fried chicken are elevated by artful preparation and presentation.

When fully built out, the St. Augustine Fish Camp will seat almost 200 people indoors and outdoors, as well as and two fully stocked bars. Williams said the majority of its staff and servers are drawn from the local area, and that will be the case with the St. Augustine restaurant as well. He expects to begin hiring about 50 employees beginning sometime in mid-December.

With new and interesting food concepts popping up in the Ancient City all the time, does Williams have any concerns about standing out in the local culinary scene?

"I think the fact that we are already known and established here [in the area] helps," Williams said. "And we don't really see ourselves as competitors but partners. There are a lot of restaurants, but there's enough to go around for everyone."

Not surprisingly, the company is looking to expand its brand even farther and is currently scouting out other potential fish camp locations. Williams said he could not reveal at this time where they might be.