

# Eat, drink and be messy

**At Beal's Pier, locals and visitors have made memories for 90 years**

**By Nan Lincoln**

If the spirits of the late Harvard Beal and his son Elmer were to visit Southwest Harbor these days, there is a lot they likely would not recognize or understand. Harvard, who died in 1944, would wonder what happened to the little Park Theater that used to fill up on weekends with folks eager to see "Captain Blood" or some other Errol Flynn or Douglas Fairbanks swashbuckler. He'd likely be sorry to hear that the elegant Dirigo Hotel that for much of his life towered over High Street had burned to the ground in 1960 and he'd look in vain for the big art deco Gordon and White garage on Main Street where his truck and other vehicles were serviced. His son Elmer "Buzzie" Beal, who passed in 2010, might be surprised to discover no in-town grocery store, and that the ground floor of the Masonic building, which in his lifetime had morphed from a men's haberdashery to an antique dealer, is now a fancy wine and cheese shop.

But if they continued their perambulation down Clark Point Road, they would start feeling right at home again. The juxtaposition of grand summer homes and inns and little bungalows strung along both sides of the street like a string of mismatched pearls would look familiar, as would the newly renovated Claremont Hotel perched like royalty above the harbor. Most familiar of all, perhaps, would be Beal's Lobster Pier, the last stop before the Coast Guard station. Harvard, who had been a lighthouse keeper out on remote Mount Desert Rock before deciding it wasn't the best fit for a family man with six children, bought the wharf in 1922 after earning enough from buying and selling lobster from a barge moored in the harbor.

Certainly, the father and son would note changes to what had, in Harvard's day, been a busy port for local fishermen to bring their day's



PHOTO BY NAN LINCOLN

**In Southwest Harbor, Stuart Snyder (shown), with a business partner, acquired Beal's Lobster Pier just over a decade ago. He's standing on the front porch of his wharf-side cottage, The Gangplank.**

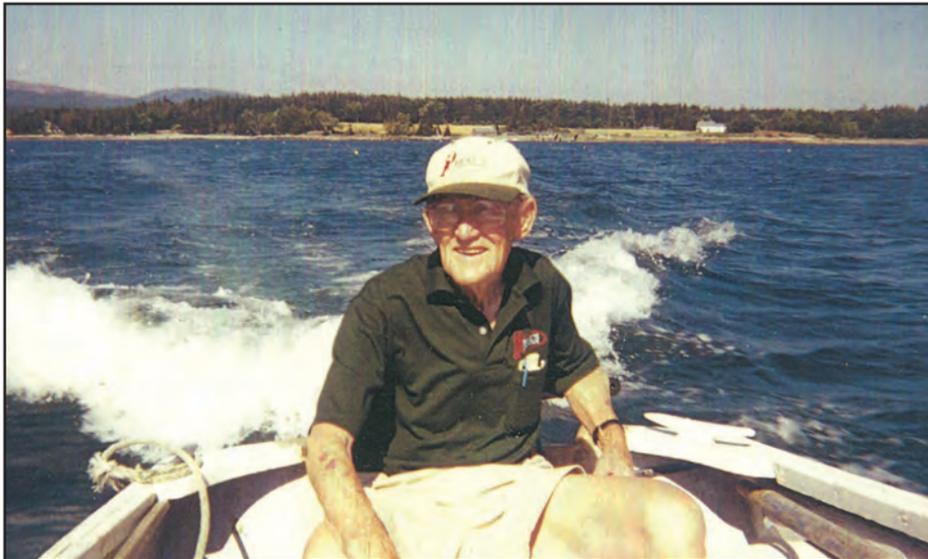


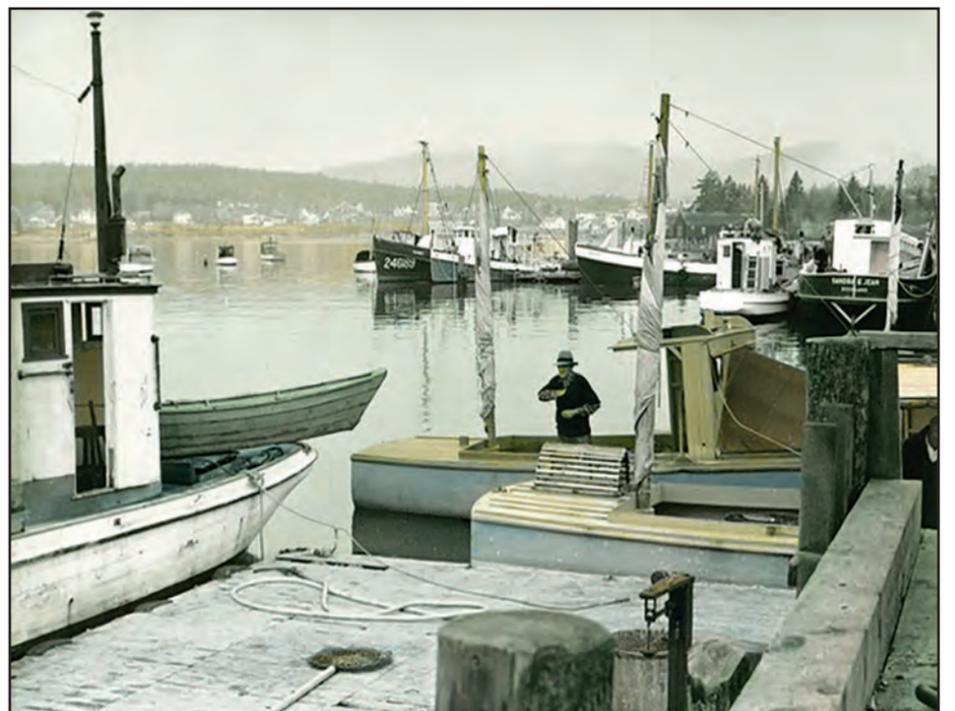
PHOTO COURTESY KENNETH BEAL

**The son of Beal's original owner Harvard Beal, Elmer "Buzzie" Beal takes his wife "Prue" (not shown) for a spin to deliver picked lobster meat to a Northeast Harbor restaurant. The Beals were in their mid-80s at the time.**



SUZANNE MADEIRA PHOTO

**Beal's Lobster Pier doubles as a working wharf and scenic restaurant where sunsets can be spectacular.**



WILLIS HUMPHREYS BALLARD PHOTO COURTESY SOUTHWEST HARBOR LIBRARY

**At Beal's wharf in 1946, fisherman George Benjamin Dolliver stands aboard his peaked-hood lobster boat built by Charles Wesley Bracy. The lobster smack Elva L. Beal is tied up to the left.**

array of homemade pies and shelves full of merchandise — caps, cups and T-shirts bearing the Beal's Lobster Pier logo, urging its customers to "Eat, Drink and Be Messy."

Harvard, who despite his stint as a lighthouse keeper, was truly an entrepreneur at heart, would certainly approve of all this. Buzzie, who spent the first half of his life as a high-liner fisherman, before taking over the wharf from his dad, might lament that the business is no longer in the family (his son Sam died just a year after he did and the family sold the wharf soon after). Still, he would be pleased to see how the new owners, Stuart Snyder, and his financial partner Russ Bernard are upholding the traditions his father had started 90 years ago, and that he maintained into the 21st century.

"Beal's is part of our family history, too," says Snyder. "We've come here for decades to buy lobster and celebrate family occasions, while our kids ran up and down the dock."

His is not a unique story. Hundreds if not thousands of summer folks consider dining on Beal's Lobster Pier or picking up live lobster

**Continued on Page 9**

catch and expect to get a fair price for it. Now, 90 years later, the wharf is also bustling with summer folk and tourists from all over the world, who watch as the boats still unload their lobsters, while they enjoy sumptuous lobster dinners under festive red and white umbrellas. Just over a decade ago, Beal's Lobster Pier was acquired by Stuart Snyder, whose family frequented the wharf in summer for generations.

The old bait house area, once loaded with barrels of ripe herring, is now filled with steaming clam, corn and lobster cookers, glass cases displaying an

# At Beal's Pier, locals and visitors have made memories for 90 years

Continued from Page 3 for their pots at home, an important highlight of their summer vacation, but few of these would have considered even for a moment of running such a multifaceted concern when it went up for sale. First and foremost, there's the fishermen's trust to earn — no easy task, that — then there is bait to be bought, packing and shipping for the wholesale trade to manage, staffing for the wharf and the restaurant, supplies, maintenance, licensing, bookkeeping ... well, a lot.

From the sun-struck front porch of his little wharf-side cottage, aptly named The Gangplank with its long view of the harbor beyond, Snyder, a trim, 50-something gentleman, looks a more like the cat who ate the canary than a man who has bitten off more than he can chew.

"Yes," he says, embracing his magnificent



PHOTOS BY NAN LINCOLN

Beal's Lobster Pier still bustles with local fishermen unloading their lobster catches. The live crustaceans are stored in crates ("cars") in saltwater chambers on the dock.



Beal's Lobster Pier owner Stu Snyder's nephew Justin manages the wholesale lobster operation. Justin says "there isn't anything I'd rather be doing."

view framed by his charmingly quaint enterprise. "This, this is why I did it. We wanted to make this a profitable business, of course, but at the same time preserve the essence of what the Beal family created here, and so far, it's been working out well."

He says one of the best compliments he has received since taking over Beal's came from an older local gent, who after getting a tour of the wharf, with its new additions and changes, commented, "Well, I guess not only bad ideas come from away."

A New Yorker in the entertainment industry taking on a traditional working fish wharf? It sounds more like the premise of one of the

movies Snyder produces in his other life than a good business prospectus.

But somehow it appears to be working.

"I think Stu is a great guy," says Buzzie Beal's daughter Suzanne Madeira, who with her husband, Pete, ran the Captain's Galley restaurant and other wharf operations for many years. She adds that the 30 or so fishermen who still bring their catch to Beal's is evidence that, like her father and grandfather, Snyder and his nephew Justin Snyder, who manages the wharf operation, are doing something right.

Like his uncle, Justin admits to having had absolutely no experience running a commercial

fishing-related business, but after seven years on the job feels he's got a good handle on it.

He points to the wharf's new floats that, to be honest, look like they're made from giant gray Lego blocks. This, it turns out, is not far off the mark.

"We had to assemble all this," he says with not just a hint of pride. "It was some project, but we got it done."

Suzanne's grandmother Elva and her mother, Prue Beal, used to sit in the main office at the top of the wharf. They kept the books and fielded phone calls from worried fishermen's wives



WILLIS HUMPHREYS BALLARD PHOTO COURTESY KENNETH BEAL

At H. R. Beal lobster wharf, Elmer "Buzzie" Beal salts the mackerel twine. Wearing a cap and standing in the seine boat is Buzzie's uncle, Maurice Beal.



At Beal's, Midwesterner Santiago Gutierrez busily picks out the sweet, succulent meat from the boiled lobster's various body parts.

and moms, checking to see if their boys had come in safely that evening. It's all about doing right for the fishermen and the wharf crews.

"This is what the real America is all about," Justin says. "There isn't anything I'd rather be doing."

It is still June but a good number of Americans, like Santiago Gutierrez from Michigan, and probably some European and Asian folks are already having a swell time this afternoon tying on bibs, cracking open lobsters, dipping steamers in butter and enjoying a quintessential Maine experience on this glorious sunny afternoon on the pier.

If Harvard and Buzzie Beal might raise an eyebrow or two at the gluten-free and veggie

options being offered at the Captain's Galley these days, they'd surely applaud Stu Snyder's plans to create a fully indoor dining room on the wharf for the colder shoulder seasons and even the still nascent idea of sending out food trucks to take the Beal's dining experience on the road.

Beal's is also planning some special events this summer to celebrate its 90th, including a visit from travel writer and television correspondent Peter Greenberg, who plans to broadcast a show from the wharf.

So, it appears after nine decades of trials, triumphs and some tragedies, Beal's Lobster Pier continues to be in good hands even if they happen to come from away.