

Daily inspiration at Henley's Steak & Seafood



Photos by **Leigh Cort** / Special to the Recorder
Henley's Executive Chef Melody Stewart

One could easily get lost in St. Augustine – lost in the fascinating history, extraordinary architecture, tempting galleries, lively restaurant kitchens and brick-paved avenues. It's a jewel of dining options. Patrick and Annmarie Henley are respected familiar faces in the city from owning their first pub-style bar on the waterfront for ten years. Now their second dream has brought the downtown historic district Henley's Steak & Seafood, proudly positioned on an iconic corner of St. George Street and Hypolita. It's a jewel of pleasurable pursuits, providing open-air balconies, lavish indoor bar and handsomely polished dark wood trimmed dining rooms where guests can enjoy some of the highest quality triple-star dining in northeast Florida prepared by Chef Melody Stewart.

If you're a wild beer sampler, Patrick's career in how and why to pour the best and most extensive selection of brews inspired the 100+ beers on tap. Henley's leads the parade where one can luxuriate in the quandary of which pour to select for lunch, dinner, late night dining or to just stop in for a Spaten Lager, Kronenbourg or Hoegaarden!

With two first floor entrances that lead you upstairs to Henley's fashionable décor, you're immediately surrounded by vivacious professional staff and warm welcomes everywhere. It's a gracious representation of 'neighborhood' with enough prime-view seating options that makes a visit more than a meal, especially when you can sit above the city vibe and people watch. But it's also a comfortable place where business people can discuss issues over a snifter of brandy or a bourbon reserve and



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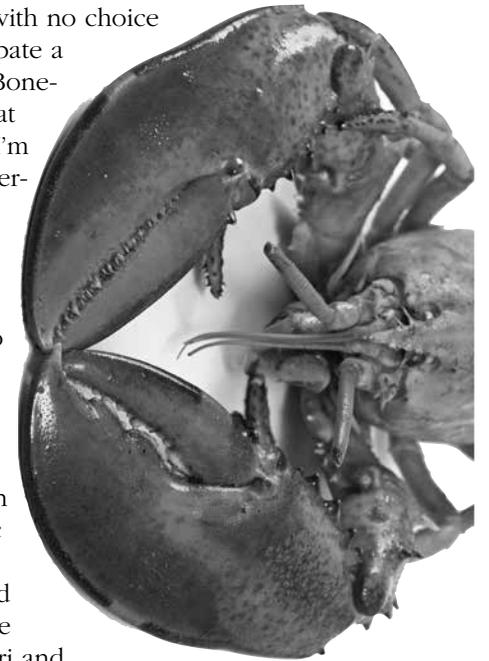
enjoy leisurely dining away from the crowds.

Whether you're a gourmand, contemporary foodie or weary traveler, the aromas from Chef Melody's kitchen will accompany you to her daily selections, which somehow transport you from page to page; your impulsiveness may tempt you to want everything on the menu. Known for raising the bar at many of the area's leading restaurants, she now has her 'own kitchen' that the Henley's have bestowed upon her.

Their discerning choice of Harris Ranch beef that is hormone free, grass and grain fed left me with no choice

but to anticipate a Chargrilled Bone-In Ribeye that (days later) I'm still remembering. It was flawlessly prepared. Select a sauce or two to accompany from the variety of chimichurri, bacon bleu, cognac peppercorn or sherry and shrooms. The chimmichuuri and bacon bleu were ethereal! If ordering from The Butcher's Block please select a side dish too. White cheddar creamed spinach (fresh spinach) couldn't have been more delicious, prepared to order and not over salted.

Chef's Maine Lobster Pasta was lusciously composed. I was swept away with jumbo



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Shrimp and grits by
Chef Melody Stewart
at Henley's Steak and
Seafood



One hundred beers are on tap at Henley's Steak & Seafood.

Henley's

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pieces of freshly shelled succulent lobster, English peas and mushrooms dancing under roasted garlic lemon cream sauce over linguine. I was compelled to eat it very slowly, savoring the brilliant flavor combinations. Wow! There isn't one lackluster description on her menu including Crispy Seared Duck topped with Orange Reduction served with White Cheddar Risotto or Salmon Glazed with Honey, Balsamic and Whole Grain Mustard, baked & topped with Caramelized Onions served with couscous.

As tasty light jazz played in the background, I only imagined Henley's casual lunch menu that would encourage me to return and indulge in a bit of lighter fare like Bacon Wrapped Shrimp — Horseradish Stuffed, Grilled and served with Thai BBQ Glaze — or this creative wizardly Chef's sandwich named 'The Fab' — Chargrilled Filet Mignon, Brie Cheese, Grape Cilantro Salsa on Texas Toast! Melody hardly leaves her guests an appetite for dessert.

Ah, dessert. They're not listed on the menu because they're all inspired spontaneously each day. One might describe them as 'daily inspirations'. Butter Pecan Caramel Bread Pudding, Raspberry Cabernet Cake with Citrus Coulis — or Crème Brulee Granita. This happy ending is only the beginning of one of St. Augustine's newest dining adventures. Henley's opened on New Years Eve and is continuing a tradition of culinary discovery. It's a magical city where restaurants enjoy preserving a reputation for excellence. It's hard to say where the past ends and today begins. The Henleys have put their heart into a captivating new restaurant. When I come back, I'll start where I left off — not being lost at all.



Ahi Tuna entree at Henley's



Ambiance of Henley's Steak & Seafood main dining room