

Pirate's Cove

L 30° 19.2' N / Lo 87° 32.0' W

Pirate's Cove is a unique, 52-year-old waterfront restaurant, bar, marina and music venue. It has it all. Classic grilled burgers, cold beer, a place to tie up your boat and good Southern music next to the water. It just doesn't get any better than this. Owned by the Mueller family for over 50 years, the wooden building housing the Cove has been standing next to Arnica Bay for 87 years. Currently run by Paul Mueller, Pirate's Cove is a hub of activity for the area. In addition to the Wood Boat Festival, the Cove hosts the Fast Women's Regatta in July and the Lost Bay Regatta in September, each of which is sponsored by the Point Yacht Club. There's also a fundraiser for autistic children in June, and the annual Frank Brown International Songwriters Festival in November. There are parties aplenty at the Cove, including the annual Halloween Costume Party, the Thanksgiving Community Pot Luck Dinner, the annual Christmas Party, and the Royal Order of the Disorderly Order of Riff Raff Parade and Ball (Feb. 22 if you're intrigued).

Paul said that he's pretty sure the original building was erected as a general store during the Great Depression, when the nearby Intracoastal Waterway was being constructed. After that, the store became a post office. Paul's grandfather was the original Mueller who purchased the Cove in 1956. Back then, there was a public beach next to the Cove, which had a diving board, a slide and a beach park.

When Grandpa Mueller ran the store, his wife cooked white tablecloth style dinners. "My grandmother fixed Bistro type meals, very upscale for the area. People would come from the Pensacola Yacht Club and the Mobile Yacht Club to eat her meals. Her family owned a high-end hotel in Chicago, where she learned to cook. But unless someone called ahead with an order, she'd just fix what she wanted to fix," said Paul.

The Cove currently serves tasty burgers, fried chicken, hot dogs, pizza and a variety of other fun foods. The burgers are their top item, featuring a secret sauce that's been around for decades. The exact ingredients aren't made public, but Paul let slip that there's horseradish, gin, vermouth and mustard in the family recipe. When asked about the portions, Paul said, "We don't measure when we make it. You know you messed up if it's the wrong color." Paul also recommends the specialty combo pizzas, named for different

people. The pizza bearing Paul's name features pepperoni, ham, sausage, green peppers, squeezed banana peppers, jalapeños, and mozzarella. It's spicy.

The signature drink at the Cove is the Bushwhacker, personally recommended by Curt Morse, owner of Caribiana Sea Skiffs. Paul says it's a frozen drink that contains ice cream, coconut rum, Kahlua, with some 151 rum on top. If that doesn't float your boat, there's plenty more to choose from.

The Wood Boat Festival in May was started by locals who wanted to feature local wooden workboats, which are disappearing quickly. Other boats now appear, including some that are converted from local workboats, or which are based on the local boat's design. The Joshua, a 65' sailboat recently built in Mobile, has appeared. Skiffs, kayaks, trawlers . . . you never know what kind of boat will show up for the show.

Live music is a vital part of the Cove's appeal. Paul describes the music offerings as "an eclectic mix, all over the place. Some events are high energy, like Grayson Capps & the Stumpknockers, and others, like the songwriters festival, are very subdued." The music is usually located outside on the covered deck, unless the weather is bad. There's music on Saturday nights, and during warmer weather, also on Sunday afternoons.

Pirate's Cove is also a marina, with 16 slips on the bayou behind the building and a dock out front on the bay for daytime docking. The bayou slips have electricity and are for longer stays. The dock is just for daytime use with no electricity or overnight dockage.

The regulars at Pirate's Cove are an eclectic mix, just like the music. They can be lawyers or bankers to normal working folks to the occasional sailing vagrant. No matter what their vocation or standing in society, they are all officially know as Riff Raff. Yes, there's a story. Around 25 years ago, Paul's Dad applied for a permit to make an addition to the Cove. "Dad had to appear at a hearing to get the permit. Some people showed up to contest the permit and said that the people who went to Pirate's Cove were just 'riff raff'. The officer presiding over the hearing was a Pirate's Cove regular. Dad got his permit, and ever since, regulars are Riff Raff."

Drive or sail up to Pirate's Cove for great food, fun music and the nicest bunch of Riff Raff you'll ever meet.