

Oyster and taco bar Casa Pearl to open on Merrimac Trail next week



Casa Pearl will open at 722 Merrimac Trail on Dec. 4. (Rodrigo Arriaza / Virginia Gazette)

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NOVEMBER 30, 2018, 3:15 PM | WILLIAMSBURG

Casa Pearl will serve up a fresh take on oysters, tacos and more when it opens on Merrimac Trail Tuesday.

The restaurant, owned by husband and wife team Michael and Chelsea Maksimowicz, will feature oysters and tacos, but guests can also expect to find clams, shrimp, flounder and black sea bass on the seafood-inspired menu, Michael Maksimowicz said. Casa Pearl will also feature a raw bar with a shucker to chat with customers and transform guests into oyster lovers, he said.

The restaurant's menu combines favorite foods from both Michael's and Chelsea's childhoods, they said.

“My wife’s family is from Nicaragua, so tacos were something that was huge in her upbringing,” Maksimowicz said. “I grew up on the Chesapeake Bay and the Potomac River, so seafood was my upbringing, so we just mashed our two upbringings together and our love for those items.”

Michael Maksimowicz, co-owner and head chef at the new restaurant, comes from a background working in fine dining and was previously a chef at Michelin Star restaurant Fiola in Washington, D.C. He said he wanted to offer quality ingredients in a more casual atmosphere.

“I love doing really good food, really intricate food, but I really hated the stuffy atmosphere that comes with super fine dining,” he said. “We wanted to come up with a concept that had really high end, good food using good ingredients, but in a casual atmosphere that was family-friendly at a lower price point.”

As excited as he was to open the restaurant, Maksimowicz said he ran into a fair share of challenges when redeveloping the building, which was formerly a Texaco gas station before closing in 2002.

Since then, York County Director of Economic Development Jim Noel said several companies unsuccessfully tried to redevelop the building until the Maksimowicz family purchased the property last February.

“They’ve redeveloped this site that used to be an eyesore,” Noel said. “We’re very excited about it. Not only does it add something for our citizens, but it’s good for tourists and helps to bolster us as a food destination.”

The restaurant will have a staff of 17 employees when it opens, Maksimowicz said, and will be closed Mondays, open from 11:30 a.m. to 10 p.m. Tuesdays through Thursdays, and will stay open until 11 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays. Casa Pearl will only offer dinner service during its first week of operation.

For more information, visit eatcasapearl.com.

Ellen Smith Gajda, owner and principal broker of **Williamsburg Realty**, was named the 2019 president of the **Williamsburg Area Association of Realtors** at the organization’s annual Installation & Business meeting last week.

The group, which is comprised of more than 400 Realtors from the Greater Williamsburg area, covers and reports on housing market trends in Williamsburg, James City County, York County, New Kent County, Charles City County, Newport News, Hampton, Surry and Gloucester. Smith Gajda will take over for previous President and CEO Lisa Noon.

A graduate of Georgia Southern University, Smith Gajda has worked in real estate since 2001 with experience as both a broker and owner, according to a news release. Prior to establishing Williamsburg Realty in 2014, Smith Gajda worked as a sales agent in Williamsburg and northern Virginia, and was a managing broker at Sotheby's Realty, according to the release.

Smith Gajda is also a member of area nonprofits including the Heritage Humane Society and FISH, the release states.

For more information, visit waarealtor.com.

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