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LANDMARK RESTAURANT SOLD, SEAFOOD HOUSE TO OPEN

By Dennis Friedel

Owners of the Lamp Post restaurant one of the area's oldest family owned businesses confirmed Friday they have sold the property to a local management company.

The company, JJS Partners LLC, has leased the restaurant to a Baltimore firm that plans to open a Maryland style crab house at the site's Route 1 location in Midway.

"We've been trying to find a location in the Delaware beach area for the last two years and now, we're really excited about this," said Dale Slotter, co-owner of Crabby Dick's Restaurant in the Fells Point area of Baltimore.

Slotter and his partner, John Buchheit, plan to open the restaurant under the Crabby Dick's name by the end of March, with a full menu in an informal atmosphere.

The pair has leased the site from JJS Partners, which is under contract to purchase the 1.5 acres site from the Steele family of Lewes for an undisclosed amount.

"There were a lot of rumors going around that the restaurant would be torn down and townhouses built but we intended to keep it as a restaurant," said Preston Schell, who purchased the property with his partner, Jay Stein, of Rehoboth Beach.

The Lamp Post shut down Oct. 12 the first time in its 34 history, according to co-owner Mark Steele. At the time, Steele said his family planned to remodel the restaurant and reopen for the 2004 tourist season.

"That was the plan a complete makeover. Then the phone rang, we stared talking and looking at other options and thinking about the best thing to do," Steele said.

Steele's grandmother, Ruth Steele, started the restaurant in 1969 under the name of Libby's Cottage. The name was changed to the Lamp Post in 1978 and, except for brief intervals, had remained open year-round until October.

"We've certainly cooked our fair share of crab cakes. This wasn't an easy decision but we felt it was the right thing to do," Steele said.

Steele and his brother Richard also own Café Azafran on Market Street in Lewes. "We wanted to expand that and serve dinner six months out of the year," Steele said.

Known primarily as a fine dining restaurant, when the Lamp Post re-opens as Crabby Dick's, customers will note quite a change, Slotter said.

"The carpet will come up and be replaced by plank flooring. It'll be a lot of fun and a little tacky in an eclectic atmosphere," Slotter said.

Also planned is a retail gift shop with a nautical theme selling Crabby Dick's T-shirts, mugs, hats and other paraphernalia. The restaurant will serve steamed crabs and seafood entrees along with steak, chicken and pasta dishes.

The facility currently seats 220 people but the seating capacity will be reduced to make way for the gift shop, according to Slotter. "It'll be the kind of place the family can come for a meal and it won't break the bank," he said

Interested parties can contact Crabby Dick's at it Web site, www.Crabby-Dicks.com .

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