

# From big business to beach time

## **Bruce Dawson, former President of Kash and Karry supermarket and CEO of Dean and DeLuca, reveals his tropical side as owner of Sarasota's new Island Time Grill.**

By Eyal Goldshmid

**Sarasota, FL** – Bruce Dawson, owner of Sarasota's new Island Time Grill, has always loved sun-soaked locales like Florida and Hawaii. However, sharing that passion with the rest of the world has taken some time.

Born in Richmond, Virginia in 1953, and raised in the nearby small town of Lively, Dawson earned a Bachelor's Degree in Government and Foreign Affairs from the University of Virginia in Charlottesville in 1971. After graduation, he married and entered the supermarket business -- an invitation given to him by his new wife's father and uncle, who owned and operated a seven-store chain of markets in Charlotte, North Carolina.

"I was a young man, and they taught me the business from the ground up," said Dawson. "I worked in every department."

Four years later, his in-laws sold their business to Delhaize Group International, a nationwide food-supply giant that owns companies like Food Lion, Kash n' Karry and Sweetbay Supermarket, among others.

Delhaize brought Dawson aboard after the acquisition and began training him in the art of business. Through them, he attended seminars at prestigious schools like the Tuck Business School, the University of Virginia Business School and the Kellogg School, to name a few.

In the coming years, Dawson rose the ranks at Delhaize and eventually became President of Kash n' Karry. The position had him overseeing the day-to-day operations of more than 100 stores. It was a job Dawson enjoyed immensely.

"I love retail," said Dawson. "I like the people aspect. I like the constant change and challenge."

The position moved him and his family from Charlotte to Tampa -- and provided Dawson with his first true taste of the Florida lifestyle. The move would prove significant, especially later on.

In all, Dawson spent 19 years with Delhaize. Unfortunately, towards the tail end of his tenure, Delhaize purchased Hannaford Brothers Supermarkets, a large supermarket chain based in New England, and decided to limit its support of Kash n' Karry.

This caused Dawson to look elsewhere for work, and shortly after he headed to New York City to become CEO of world famous gourmet-food supplier Dean and DeLuca.

The job, at first, seemed like a dream come true. However, Dawson was with the company for only a year.

“My wife didn't like Manhattan,” said Dawson, “but Dean and DeLuca was a great company. We just missed being in Florida.”

Before leaving New York, Dawson made his first foray into the restaurant industry.

While having dinner at Chumley's, a favorite restaurant of his in Greenwich Village, Dawson was approached by friend and Chumley's owner Steve Slopak and informed about a site nearby that would become available for sale soon.

“He asked us to get involved,” said Dawson, “and we did.”

That agreement led to the creation of Blue Mill, a '40s-themed restaurant filled with art deco décor, pictures of F.D.R. and music of the period. Air France Magazine, the airline's in-flight publication, recently called it “one of the most beautiful restaurants in Manhattan.”

Still, warmer climates and subtropical living beckoned, and Dawson and his family moved back to Florida soon after, this time settling in Sarasota, just south of Tampa. Once settled, he started Dawson Enterprises, a multi-concept company dealing in real estate and restaurant development.

The efforts of the latter can be seen in Island Time Grill, Dawson's latest dining creation.

Graced with a façade of bay windows and a tropical dining room fitted with vibrant teal walls, white-washed shutters and African mahogany hardwood floors and canopies, Island Time Grill has the atmosphere of an island manor house rather than a restaurant nestled in a quaint shopping plaza.

The vantage point from Island Time Grill's bar is equally impressive. The blue-green sand-filled bar top compliments a seven-foot screen that projects a video of the ocean lapping against a sandy beach. Surrounded by shutters and curtains, guests feel as if they are gazing out an oceanfront window.

“It's kind of like a sugar plantation on St. Johns,” said Dawson.

The centerpiece of the restaurant is the three-foot-by-three-foot clock that stands inside the lobby. The item originally hung inside the Paris Railroad Station (another clock from the station hangs inside Blue Mill, says Dawson) and now serves as the restaurant's official symbol. A caricature of the clock even serves as the restaurant's logo.

"We really want our guests to feel relaxed when they come here," said Dawson. "We want them to enjoy the unhurried pace you can only find in the islands. Our saying here is, 'Relax, you're on Island Time.'"

Dawson's inspiration for the restaurant came from a trip to Hawaii he and his family took during Christmas 2004.

"We were on vacation in Maui and we were sitting in a really upscale island-themed restaurant and we looked at each other and said, 'You know, we can do this,'" said Dawson.

"We thought it was perfect for the Florida Market."

Island Time Grill is located at 8225 Cooper Creek, Blvd., Sarasota. The restaurant is open for dinner 4 to 10 p.m. Sunday through Thursday and 4 to 11 p.m. Friday and Saturday. The bar is open from 4 p.m. to midnight every day. Island Time Grill will open for business the end of February.

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