



**THE RESTAURANT**  
AT THE WILLCOX



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**For Information: Contact**  
Sarah Eakin: 803 295 2860  
[saraheakin@eakinhale.com](mailto:saraheakin@eakinhale.com)  
Stephen Hale: 803 221 4976  
[stephendhale@eakinhale.com](mailto:stephendhale@eakinhale.com)

**‘The Restaurant at The Willcox’ Opens with Unique Flair**  
*Aiken welcomes first ‘gastropub’ as new restaurateurs reach out to community*

**AIKEN, S.C. ---** The Restaurant at The Willcox has opened its doors with an enticing invitation for those who enjoy eating out. Restaurateurs, Geoff and Shannon Ellis, are shaking things up with a new dining experience in Aiken – a ‘gastropub’ an English dining term that boils down to great meals, competitively priced in a cozy and traditional venue with a fun and welcoming atmosphere.

Geoff says the new restaurant is the first ‘gastropub’ in this part of the country. His first job is to help people understand the term that might sound like some sort of stomach ailment.

“Gastropubs began in the UK 20 years ago. The concept arose from a conscious effort to promote great food in well-loved places,” he said. Historic pubs were revitalized by adding restaurant quality food while keeping the large libations list and friendly and inviting atmosphere of the traditional pubs – all with a focus on customer value and affordability. Gastropubs are now one of the biggest trends in the restaurant industry.”

“Pubs have always been wonderful gathering places for families and friends where you might mingle with others, meeting one old friend here and making a new one there.”

**But, the classic pub served humble ‘pub food’. Nourishing perhaps, but not too tasty. Gastropubs on the other hand are known for serving quality food, with everything made fresh in-house, using as many local ingredients as the market has to offer. With menu items that are innovative yet traditional.**

**Geoff and Shannon want to invite the people of Aiken to once again enjoy the historic Willcox, transforming it into, “the living room of the community,” a place where everyone feels welcome. The menu at The Restaurant ranges from chicken wings to pate, burgers and fried chicken to gorgeous certified Angus beef steaks.**

**You can eat in the restaurant if you want to. It’s quite lovely. But you don’t have to. Diners can sit next to the fireplace in The Willcox’s breathtakingly beautiful lobby; relax and take lunch by the elegant pool area; eat in privacy on the rear patio, or take repast in the library with your group. For sporting fans who want to have a little fun, they’ve brought back that great pub room in the back and added two HD televisions for the perfect football afternoon.**

**Geoff and Shannon found a beautiful, hand-carved boutique bar made in 1898 – the same year the Willcox was built – and set it up in the lobby. They and Willcox General Manager Tina McCarthy, believe this is the first time in the past 111 years that one has been set up there, yet it sits perfectly. Tuesday piano bar nights introduced by McCarthy when she recently took over the helm of the historic hotel have proved extremely popular. The Restaurant is seeking to extend that success and is open for breakfast, lunch and dinner seven days a week. “And don’t worry about how you’re dressed if you’re having fun,” said Shannon. “You do not need to dress up and are welcome as you are... if you’re coming from a day of sport or heading out to black tie...you will not feel uncomfortable here. This is your living room, and we mean it.”**

**“You’re going to meet the most interesting people here, have a great experience and then we hope you tell your friends and bring them back with you.”**

**The Willcox was once the refuge of Aiken’s famous and fabulously wealthy Winter Colony in decades gone by – today it’s far less stuffy and exclusive. “We don’t want to be known as catering to any one group or particular crowd. The Willcox is an important landmark in Aiken and we want everyone to enjoy it,” she said.**

More information is available online at [www.therestaurantatw.com](http://www.therestaurantatw.com). Diners may register online to receive a gift certificate good for dinners during the month of their birthday and receive updates on all events that The Restaurant at The Willcox is planning. The Restaurant also has a loyalty program that encourages its customers to dine often by allowing guests to accumulate points towards gift certificates for The Restaurant.

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#### Notes to Editors:

Geoff Ellis found his lifelong love of restaurants while working his way through Tulane University in New Orleans.

Back here in Aiken, where his parents live and he spent most of his summers growing up, Geoff struck up a friendship with Wally Ganzi, a former resident of Aiken who owns “Palm Restaurants” a series of fabulous steak houses across the U.S. and abroad.

Geoff opened numerous Palm restaurants across America, leading eventually to Geoff opening the grandest of them all in downtown Los Angeles, complete with two kitchens and several dining areas.

Pursuing every restaurateur’s dream of owning his own restaurant, Geoff and his wife Shannon, an MBA whose background in marketing and business management makes her the perfect partner in the business, looked at opportunities in Savannah, Charleston, Charlotte, Phoenix and more. Then they heard of an opportunity in New Zealand and visited there on an impulse buying a 16-acre farm and four restaurants within a week of arriving. They still have two of them.

It has been a great and successful adventure and both restaurants, one of which is a gastropub, are thriving as the center of attention in their towns. Both restaurants hold five events a month, cooking lessons, wine tastings, cocktail classes, golf tournaments, trivia tournaments and much, much more, a pattern Geoff and Shannon plan to implement at the Restaurant at the Willcox.

Their New Zealand Gastropub is a Heineken bar. One of only 25 in the country due to the high food and beverage standards required to become a Heineken bar. The Ellis’ gastropub has consistently been ranked among the top three in New Zealand since its opening.

**The main reason they returned to Aiken was that their daughter Grace was ready to start school. They were visiting family in Aiken when they heard Tina McCarthy mention that there was a possibility of reopening a restaurant at The Willcox.**

**Soon they had a meeting with Mr. David Garrett (the leader of the group that owns the hotel), and within hours they began plans to launch The Restaurant.**

**Then it was back to New Zealand, in part to establish a remote Internet management system with their Kiwi managers. They also went back to recruit their Executive Chef, Regan Browell to ensure quality in the kitchen from the start. She has six years experience as a chef with Ritz Carlton hotels and has worked in fine restaurants in London and other European cities.**

**The front area and restaurant manager is Aiken local John Dietzel who has two decades in the service industry, including some time at the Green Boundary Club.**

**The kitchen runs from 7 a.m., to 10 p.m., seven days a week. Breakfast is available 7 a.m., to 10 p.m., Monday through Saturday and their fabulous Sunday Brunch runs from 7 to 3. Lunch is available from 11 a.m., to 3 p.m., daily and dinner hours are 5 p.m., to 10 p.m., every day and the restaurant even offers an exciting children's menu including 'Ants on a Log' – something that has doubtless never been served before at The Willcox. The Bar Menu is available daily from 11 a.m., till 10 p.m.**

**The Restaurant offers a great bar menu for people to enjoy a light snack alone or order a selection to share among friends averaging \$7 per item. Selections from the breakfast menu average \$7. Items from the lunch menu range from \$6 to \$12. From the dinner menu, appetizers range from \$6 to \$12 and entrees range from \$11 to \$32. The venue is great for large functions and can accommodate groups from 10 to 200 people.**

**Release compiled by Eakin-Hale Publicists.  
For more information, call:  
Sarah Eakin at (803) 295-2860  
or Stephen Hale at (803) 221-4976**

