

Reinventing Yogi's: Sports Bar With a View By Roy Robertson

A prime beachfront location isn't really a prerequisite for a sports bar. Usually, the only time the view is a consideration at a sports bar is if someone's obstructing the sightline between you and the game you're watching. But with its relocation to Cardiff's Restaurant Row, extensive renovation and expansive view of the Pacific, Yogi's is clearly much more

positive, saying business has been "way beyond my expectations, and I'm an optimist. Entrepreneurs are optimistic by nature." The investment that this entrepreneur made during a 10-month floor-to-ceiling remodel is apparent. No expense was spared. "This came up, and it was like 'Take a big gulp and go for it,'" Nordling says of the investment. Thirty-two flat panel HDTVs



Owner Keith Nordling

However, Yogi's menu reflects the desire to cater both to long-time customers' expectations, and to win over new diners. Favorites such as grilled calamari strips and grilled chicken fettuccine are still featured, as is the Santa Maria-style tri-tip sandwich and prime rib burger bites. "A lot of people come in and they don't even look at a menu," Nordling says of his regulars,



Photos: Sam Wells

A few of the many flat-panel TVs in front of Yogi's bar.

than a sports bar. The new name – Yogi's Beach Bar & Restaurant – is only one of many changes owner Keith Nordling has made in the process of reinventing Yogi's at its new home on the Pacific Coast Highway. Yogi's has not only moved into a new building, they've moved into a new category. Oceanfront restaurant.

Sports bar with a view. Call it what you will. Nordling is just elated that customers – both long time denizens of the old location, and those just discovering Yogi's – have embraced the new look and feel. Nordling says the response has been overwhelmingly

sit shoulder to shoulder above the bar and wind toward the back of the restaurant. Outside, a spacious glass-enclosed patio overlooks the estuary connecting San Elijo Lagoon to the ocean. Soundproofing materials, imported from Sweden, eliminate any traffic din from the PCH, even though cars speed by just 20 feet from the restaurant.

The kitchen is also completely new. Chef Enrique "Kiki" Atempa, however, is not new to the kitchen. He's been with Nordling since he was 16. Nordling laughs thinking back to when Enrique started, saying "He lied about his age to get a job."

After 20 years, the two are still together. Clearly, allegiance to devoted employees is important to the owner. "That continuity is the hallmark of a good business. That's probably the thing I'm most proud of about this business is that these people have raised their families through these paychecks."

Nordling still sees many of the same patrons he's seen since he opened Yogi's Sports Bar Restaurant on San Elijo Avenue in 1987, but he says the circumstances have changed over the years.

"Instead of being in here at 11:00 p.m. on a Friday rocking and rolling, now they're in here Thursdays at 7 p.m. having dinner with their family, and getting home by 8:30." It's just part of the evolution he's seen in Cardiff and Encinitas over the past 20 years. "Encinitas isn't just a beach town anymore. It's not just a surf town with surf shacks. In the 20 years since Yogi's opened, people are doing a lot better in this community. They want a little bit more out of their dining experience than what Yogi's was."



Potato skins stuffed with bacon, cheese and scallions.

but with new additions like the blackened ahi appetizer, he says the menu at Yogi's is "always evolving."

So, too, are the community and the clientele. And now Nordling has a new home where he witnesses the changing tides of the area he first came to in 1978. "I love it here. I love this business." Happy with the brand he's built in Yogi's and his connection with the community, Nordling says, "It's the classic definition of a big fish in a small pond."

Now it's a big fish with a great view of the ocean. Or your favorite game on satellite TV. ☺

Yogi's Beach Bar & Restaurant is located at 2633 S. Coast Hwy 101, Cardiff-by-the-Sea, CA 92023. For more information call (760) 943-9644 or visit yogisbar.com.