

Seafood Success Story



Matt Asen oversees the Timbers Fish Market, where customers can pick up fresh fish, sauces, and recipes.

PHOTO BY RHONDA MANDEL

Timbers Fish Market

by Libby Boren McMillan

If you're one of the many people who equate Sanibel and Captiva with fresh seafood, the Timbers Fish Market may very well be your mecca. Cases at this "seafood central" for the islands are regularly stocked with eight to ten varieties of fresh finfish, including snapper, grouper, swordfish, tuna, mahi-mahi, and salmon. "We have those most of the time," says owner Matt Asen, who also runs the adjoining Timbers Restaurant. "Then from up north we get sole, haddock, and monkfish. We also have shrimp, scallops, oysters, clams, calamari, Florida lobster, and Alaskan king crab legs."

Best of all, Timbers Fish Market offers more than just fresh seafood. The market "sells its fish and shares its experience," says Asen, pointing out the many recipes kept on hand for shoppers to take home with their purchases. The shop also stocks a variety of homemade sauces,

including dill, mango, tartar, cocktail, and garlic butter. "We also have the cooked product," says Asen. "In March, we sold over seven hundred crab cakes out of the market."

But this phenomenal level of success didn't happen overnight. Opened in 1978, the Timbers Restaurant was once located on Rabbit Road (in what is now Doc Ford's Sanibel Rum Bar & Grille). Asen was often asked, "How fresh is the fish here?" To answer that question, he'd head to the cooler and end up parading a whole snapper or grouper through the restaurant.

"At that point, the entrance to the restaurant was a lounge with two tables," says Asen. "We decided to try selling a few fish, and we had a small case there. Then, because we had so many people waiting for tables, we took over Twigs [the bar next door], and the fish market moved over." At that point, Asen decided to make the market a showcase.



PHOTO BY RHONDA MANDEL

The market's wide selection is no fish story; here manager Chris Owens brandishes a grouper, while owner Asen makes nice with a snapper.

"It started off slowly, because we were competing with groceries," he explains. "But we had stuff they didn't offer, and because we could always cook and sell the fish in the restaurant, we could have really fresh fish. The Reel Eel seafood market and Sanibel Seafood were also in business then, but they couldn't offer all the products we could."

Asen used to drive to the dockside markets on Ft. Myers Beach and bring seafood back to Sanibel in his pickup truck. "Now these places deliver," he says. "It's all evolved and changed through the years."

One thing hasn't changed: the Timbers Fish Market sells a lot of seafood. "It's a 'fishious' circle," says Asen with a laugh. "Do we sell more fish because it's fresh, or is it fresh because we sell more fish?"

The Timbers Fish Market is located at 703 Tarpon Bay Rd., Sanibel, 239-395-2722. It is open Monday through Saturday from 11 a.m. until 9 p.m., and Sunday from 2 to 9 p.m.

Having grown up in Oklahoma beef country, freelance writer Libby Boren McMillan relies on helpful seafood recipes from the Timbers Fish Market.

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