

THE CAPE

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Seafood store to reopen

Ex-manager buys Pine Bay, changes name

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A longtime fish-lovers' destination reopens next month in Matlacha with a new name but a familiar face behind the counter.

Former manager Andy Meltz bought Pine Bay Seafood and plans to reopen sometime next

month under the name Andy's Island Seafood.

The opening was set back several months because of Hurricane Charley and permitting delays, Meltz said. After Charley caused power outages, Meltz also lost about \$12,000 worth of seafood in his freezer.

"I'm more than ready,"

Meltz said. "People keep calling me and asking me when it's going to open."

The former owners of Pine Bay Seafood, 4330 Pine Island Road, sold the business in April to a Colorado company. The business sold fresh fish to walk-in customers and area restaurants. It had been open for about two decades.

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The Colorado company quickly sold off all Pine Bay's equipment and basically gutted the place, Meltz said. He got back from vacation in June to find the business was closed and he was out of work.

Now Meltz and his wife, Sally Maitland, plan to cater largely to island residents instead of the local seafood industry.

In the past, Pine Bay often set aside its best fish for restaurants, Meltz said. He plans to keep that fish for his non-restaurant customers.

Meltz knows a thing or two about seafood. The former attorney switched to the fish business 12 years ago. He bought fish for The Timbers restaurant in Sanibel and The Prawnbroker in Fort Myers, and then became general manager of Pine Bay Seafood about three years ago.

Meltz figures he has an advantage: He's buying an established business where everyone

already knows his name and face.

Valerie Cleaver, 59, of Bokeelia, is one of those former customers who can't wait for Andy's Island Seafood to reopen. She used to go to Pine Bay Seafood about once a week for blue crab and other items.

"We were devastated when they closed," Cleaver said. "We weren't that impressed with the other seafood sold on the island and around the island."

Cleaver said the store had better cleanliness and quality, and that was all thanks to Meltz.

"I'm so excited," Cleaver said. "I keep looking at the door waiting for it to open."

The store's renovations include a new paint job, tiled floor, better lighting and a lower glass counter that allows a better view of the seafood, Maitland said. "It's a very clean, fresh look."

In addition to fresh local fish and frozen fish from other areas, the store will sell crab chowder, shrimp bisque, crab cakes and other Meltz recipes.