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FROM BLUEGRASS TO BARKEEP

Lexington native has carved special niche at iconic Keys bar

article and photos by Jarrett Van Meter

As he pulls the lever of his living room La-Z-Boy, popping his legs up parallel to the floor, Larry Perkins explains the local mindset that fuels the Florida Keys reputation as a uniquely desirable destination: "It's a live-and-let-live attitude, which is a good attitude to have and what we try to put forward as employees of The Caribbean Club," says Perkins. "You can do as you please as long as you aren't bothering anyone else."

As an alum of the University of Kentucky and previously Henry Clay High School, where he was part of the first class to graduate from the school's current building, Perkins moved to the South Florida area to live with his cousin and start a tropical fish business. Soon after, the then-25-year-old Perkins was introduced to the Caribbean Club in Key Largo, where a bartending spot happened to be opening up. "I figured it would just be until I found something else," he chuckles,

"but here I am." Soon after, he met his wife Ronda, and settled down. His father, after retiring from the thoroughbred business, and sister have also relocated from the Bluegrass to the Keys.

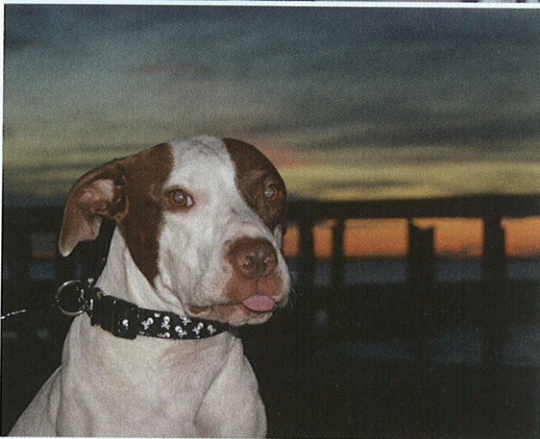
Several hours after meeting at his home, I head over to the Caribbean Club to have a drink and take in the famous sunset.

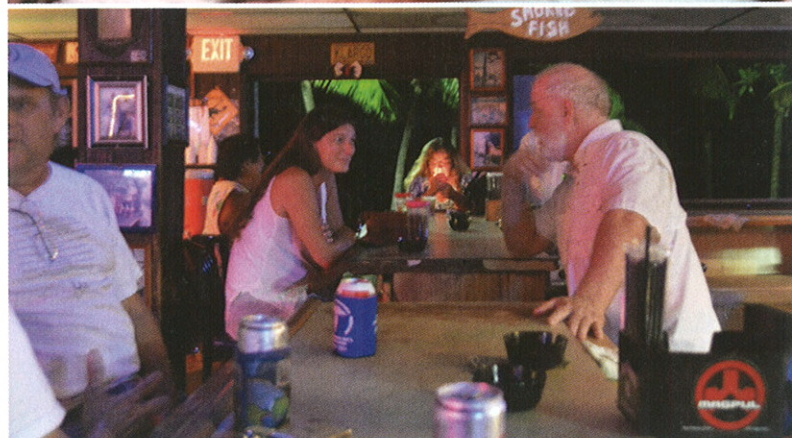
Overlooking the gorgeous Florida Bay, the bar that claims to be the filming location of Humphrey Bogart's 1948 film *Key Largo* seemingly doubles as an adult community center of sorts. Dogs are just as welcome as people, and the goings-on range from movie screenings to the occasional weekend Episcopal sermon, and Santa always makes an appearance around the holidays.

Seeing Perkins work behind the bar is like watching the mayor mingle at a town assembly, keeping conversations lively and glasses full. When asked about the bar's reputation as a social hub for locals, he responds by recounting when Hurricane Andrew swept through south Florida in 1992,

"IT'S A LIVE-AND-LET-LIVE ATTITUDE."







knocking out everyone's power. "Every time I had to go up to the club to grab something, whether it was a flashlight or anything else, five or six cars would pull up just in that small window of time to get the scoop from everyone else on what was going on or if they had heard anything about the storm," he explains.

Though perhaps most closely associated with the Club, Perkins is truly a jack-of-all-trades. Whether he is coaching high school basketball, leading fishing trips in the Bahamas or organizing softball teams, you can find his fingerprints on just about all facets of life in the Keys.

However much the Keys way of life may agree with him though, he never forgets his roots. "I still keep in touch with all those guys from Lexington," he says. "I try to visit at least once a year, and every time we are reunited, no matter how long it has been, it feels like yesterday since we last talked." ■



For more information on The Caribbean Club, visit CaribbeanClubKL.com.

