

Tidewater Virginia's labyrinthine estuaries make for an abundance of a special sort of dining genre — the marina restaurant. In fall, these restaurants come alive, thanks to warm breezes and a sudden lack of mosquitoes. PAULETTE DININNY reports that Alexandria has one of the more interesting of the genre.



On the Waterfront

Duane Keller's life went from cold to hot — literally. He grew up on the ice and was a hockey player in Calgary, Canada, until he traded his hockey stick for the heat and pots and pans of restaurant kitchens. Today he's executive chef at Alexandria's Potowmack Landing Restaurant, where he put the landmark eatery on the culinary score-board with his creativity and attention to quality.

"Preparing food is not difficult. The simpler the better," Keller says. It's a statement that belies his talent, however. He shook up the staid seafood and fish restaurant, increased revenues and made it a destination with his inventive techniques and modern twists. For instance, the "killer" Smoked Salmon Cheesecake that he developed over years remains a hit. "Some people don't under-



stand what it is when they hear the name, but it's a savory appetizer that becomes a favorite wherever I put it on the menu."

Believing that food should speak for itself, he tweaks dishes and produces delicious results such as his Tempura Fried Oysters or the appetizer Captain Daingerfield's Barnacle shrimp, a Dijon-marinated jumbo Gulf shrimp wrapped in bacon with a chipotle BBQ sauce.

A fan of the region's offerings, Keller researches the history of the Potomac, local Indian tribes and ingredients. One result is Iroquois Salad, which combines field greens, blackberries, apples and blue cheese with sun-dried tomato basil vinaigrette. His menus reflect the four seasons with different styles of food throughout the year. Chesapeake Bay Bluefish might be used in a spread with grilled pita and lemon wedges. From May to October,

Above left, a family visiting from Michigan plays on the lawn in front of the marina with a sailing class behind them. Above, the tomato stack with beef steak tomato, fresh mozzarella, basil, sun-dried tomato pesto and Bermuda onion. Left, indoor and outdoor seating on the Potomac.