

There's a new generation of seafood industry entrepreneurs in the Lowcountry, and one of the most successful is Craig Reaves.



Craig and his wife, Jenna, head up a handful of enterprises that serve up salvation just as readily as they do fresh shrimp and fish. You kind of get the picture when you see the ichthys on their signs. By the way, an ichthys is a Jesus fish like the one you see on a lot of people's cars. In these fish markets, faith comes alive. The first time I ever shopped at CJ Seafood Express in Port Royal, I was in for a treat. As the clerk weighed and wrapped my purchase, his voice sprang forth with a fountain of poetry that celebrated his Christian faith. It was an interaction I'll never forget, not only because of the beauty of his words, but the unique and inspirational quality of the experience.

I knew I was someplace special. That was a few years ago, though. The fish markets are so busy now that there's not much time for recitation, and that's probably for the best, because some of customers might not be into that kind of thing.

Despite the lack of poetry, these are still special places.

And it all started many decades ago, up in Holden Beach, North Carolina.

That's where Craig's father, Laten Reaves, set up a fish market and opened a restaurant, Reaves Fish Camp. Craig still has an old, yellowed newspaper ad featuring the North Carolina businesses. He keeps it beneath the counter at his fish market in Beaufort, Sea Eagle Market, where he also has Ziploc bags full of photos that document fishing life here in the Lowcountry.

There are photos of his family's boats, the Gracie Belle and the Forgiven. There's the family dock out on Rose Island Road, off of Eddings Point Road on St. Helena Island. There's the blessing of the fleet at the Water Festival, with the church youth group riding on shrimp boats decorated with Christian themes. Craig says one of his favorites was when they decorated a boat with a couple of big waves. The youth wore their swim suits, and the sign read "Catch the wave, Jesus Saves."

Craig also has photos of another type of shrimp boat parade – and in these pictures, the boats have no decorations, and the captains and crew are on a most decidedly business-like mission. These photos show the fleet of shrimp boats that sailed into Port Royal to bring attention to the threat of the docks there being closed down. This was in September 2007.

Craig and Jenna have been huge supporters of their friend and fellow shrimper, Mark Smith, who is working with the town of Port Royal to save the historic shrimp docks there.

A recent article in the *Gullah Sentinel* (the January 10 edition) describes how the Reaves family ended up in Beaufort, and provides a little more background on the family. It's a good read, and the Reaves are also regular advertisers, so it's a good source to check on what's fresh and what specials might be going on.

For example, on January 21, in honor of Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday, they offered free shrimp and grits at Sea Eagle. There are discounts for people in the service on Military Tuesday. And sometimes you can clip a coupon that will get you 10% off the price of your purchase.

It's always a good idea to know who stands behind the seafood you are buying. I first came into contact with the Reaves family when I was a child, when Laten would come down from North Carolina to shrimp here in the 1960s. He packed at my father's dock on Lady's Island, and eventually settled down here with his family. Craig's mother and father are still heavily involved in the business, and they can often be found at the Sea Eagle Market on Boundary Street, which the family acquired in October 2007.

Craig's brother, Cameron, is what you might call the company's CFO – the chief fishing officer. He spends a lot of his time on the water, catching shrimp and crabs and gathering oysters, while Craig spends more and more of his time on land as his businesses grow.

One of the most interesting things at Sea Eagle is a mural on the front side of the counter. It's a landscape that shows the Rose Island Seafood dock and the surrounding marshes in all their expansive glory. It was painted by another Craig – this one Craig Valentine, a crew member on the Reaves' boats. I have a feeling he could make a lot more money painting than he could shrimping, but it's probably like having the best of both worlds to do both.

The Reaves have brought many gifts into this community – they give jobs to talented artists and poets, they provide a steady supply of fresh local seafood, they keep our sense of place intact with their dock and shrimp boats, and they are good for our tax base.

But I would say that for them, the most important thing is sharing their faith. It's more than a fish market – it's a mission.

If you go:

Sea Eagle Market, Beaufort, (843)521-5090

2242 Boundary Street, next to Huddle House in Beaufort, (843)521-5090. Open

Monday-Saturday 10-6:30; fish cleaning up until 6 pm.

The Reaves offer a wide selection of local seafood, including shrimp, fish, crabs and oysters, at this market. They also have fresh seafood, including scallops, that comes from reputable sources in other locales. There's a variety of organic meats and chicken from Wil-Moore Farms, in Lugoff. And you can get spices and breading mixes, and I recommend the local We Island Gumbo N Ting products. A special treat on Saturdays, and on some Friday afternoons: the folks from We Island are there with their big stew pot, selling freshly made, delicious shrimp gumbo to go. Get the big container, cause it's good.

CJ Seafood Express

1421 Ribaut Road, next to Alvin Ord's in Port Royal, (843)812-6344. Open Monday-Saturday 10-6.

This is the fast food drive in version of a fish market. You drive up, check what they have in the coolers, make your choice, then off you go. There's a more limited selection than at Sea Eagle, but most of it is fresh, a lot of it is local, and it sure is convenient.

Rose Island CJ Seafood, 124 Rose Island Road, St. Helena Island, (843)838-2062.

This is where the dock is. I haven't been here yet, so I'm saving the details for another column. I just want to make sure you understand that the seafood markets are in town are affiliated with an actual dock, with actual fishermen catching actual local food.