



NEWS RELEASE

## **A San Diego Institution Celebrates 40 Years**

**San Diego, CA – April 13, 2009** – On May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2009, the first Brigantine Seafood Restaurant will turn 40. Tasteful observances are planned in all Brigantine locations, including a “\$40 for 40” Dinner for two offered Thursdays during May, and the release of a special 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary bottling of the Brigantine’s 2007 Reserve Chardonnay. The 2007 Anniversary Reserve Chardonnay earned a silver medal at the recent San Diego International Wine Competition.

When husband and wife team, Mike and Barbara Morton opened their first Brigantine on Shelter Island in May 1969, little did they know that 40 years later they would be celebrating the anniversary of a 14-unit restaurant company.

Mike and Barbara wore many hats in those early days. Mike pulled shifts as cook, server, host and janitor; while Barbara’s responsibilities included hostess, cocktail server and bookkeeper. The name “Brigantine” was derived in a very democratic way - it was drawn from a hat. The first Brigantine menu consisted of 9 menu items, including a “late-night entrée”, and the dreaded “beef stew”. On display in the home office are two original menus – both on round wood planks. The early version, with all nine menu items, and the revised menu where beef stew has literally been scratched from the menu. (A steak knife was likely the tool of choice.)

The Brigantine overcame the odds, and in the summer of 1973, Mike and Barbara opened a second Brigantine location in Coronado, followed thereafter by restaurants in Del Mar and Escondido. Today there are Brigantine Seafood Restaurants in seven locations throughout the county, including La Mesa, Poway and Eastlake.

From the nine original menu items, and then eight, the restaurants' menus have certainly evolved over the years. In fact, when Mike Morton and Nick Vitalich of Chesapeake Fish Company were conducting valuable quality-control during Happy Hour one day, they came up with a term to describe their freshly caught fish. Little did they know that their mutually-coined phrase, "Catch of the Day", would ultimately appear on seafood menus around the globe.

In 1982, the Brigantine team decided to take advantage of some in-house culinary talent, opening Miguel's Cocina in the space behind the Coronado Brigantine. The restaurant was an instant success and another Miguel's was opened in the original Brigantine location just two years later. The Shelter Island Brigantine had moved down and across the street to its present location above the marina. In January 2004, The Brigantine Family of Restaurants opened a third Miguel's Cocina in the Eastlake Village Shopping Center.

Responding to a need for large party space at Miguel's Coronado, Miguelito's *Sala de Artes y Comer* opened in an adjacent space, across from the historic Hotel Del Coronado in May of 2007. Miguelito's is a one-of-a-kind neighborhood gallery and boutique with two private dining rooms, along with art, gifts, spirits and cuisine influenced by the many cultures of Mexico.

In the late 1990's, Mike and Barbara set out to find the perfect location to open a fine-dining restaurant concept, and in May 1999, Azul La Jolla opened, serving California Cuisine on La Jolla's fashionable Prospect Street. By 2008, the company's senior leadership team recognized the need to differentiate themselves from the other California Cuisine restaurants on the street, at the same time acknowledging an absence of Prime steakhouses in La Jolla Village. Supported by a nearly decade-long reputation for superior service, incomparable food, and some of San Diego's best views of La Jolla Cove and the Pacific shoreline, the group took the leap. Today, The Steakhouse at Azul La Jolla offers San Diego's first steakhouse experience one-hundred feet above La Jolla Cove.

Zócalo, whose name is derived from the central square in the heart of Latin American villages replaced the Old Town Brigantine in the summer of 2002. Born out of an ADA remodel and some out-of-the-box thinking, the Old Town Brigantine was transformed into a Nuevo Latino dining concept. The nouveau Old Town design integrates elements of the traditional zócalo in both architecture and décor. With the success of the Old Town Zócalo, the company opened a second location in the 4S Ranch community in the fourth quarter of 2008.

The Brigantine Family of Restaurants is truly a San Diego tradition. The Brigantine name is synonymous with Fresh Swordfish, Fish Tacos, Great Oyster Bars and bustling Happy Hours. In the late 1980's, the Brigantine received national attention when USA Today published a piece entitled, "Restaurants on the Road", acknowledging the Brigantine for serving, "the best swordfish in the world". And over the years, Brigantine Family Restaurants have received numerous awards and accolades, some many times over, including "Best American Cuisine", "Best Seafood", "Best Mexican Restaurant", "Best Ethnic Restaurant", "Best New Restaurant", "Best View Restaurant", "Most Romantic Restaurant", "Best Happy Hour", "Best Bar" and even "Best Pick-Up Spot". The Brigantine's reputation for quality, value and guest satisfaction are apparent in everything they do.

While son Mike Morton Jr. took over the reigns as President and CEO in 2007, Mike and Barb continue to be actively involved in the day-to-day operations of the organization. Mike Sr.'s obligations as Chairman have relieved him of janitorial duties, but in addition to overseeing the company, he is very involved in the community. Mike currently sits on the board of San Diego Trust Bank. He is a board member and former President of the San Diego Chapter of the California Restaurant Association, member and former President of San Diego Rotary Club 33, member and former President of The Executives' Association, and has served on the boards of former financial institutions, Peninsula Bank and San Diego Trust & Savings, as well as on the boards of the Red Cross and YMCA. An alumnus of San Diego State University, Mike Morton Sr., along with The Brigantine Family of Restaurants continues to be an active supporter of the SDSU's School of Hospitality & Tourism Management. A number of current and former students are among the more than 1200 people currently employed in Brigantine restaurants.

As Vice President in charge of Design, Barbara works around the clock directing the company's new construction projects. Both the Eastlake Brigantine and Zócalo 4S Ranch opened in 2008. She is project lead for all remodels and redesigns, including the change in design and concept for The Steakhouse at Azul La Jolla late last year, and the redesign of the original Brigantine in Shelter Island, completed during the first quarter of 2009. Barbara is also responsible for maintaining the style and integrity of all fourteen of the Brigantine Family Restaurant locations. Barbara sits on the board for the Point Loma Association, and has been recognized for her support of the Children's Hospital and Coronado Hospital Foundations.

Keeping the Brigantine tradition in the family, the Morton's four children quite literally grew up in the restaurant business. In addition to company President and CEO, Mike Morton Jr., the Brigantine team includes eldest son, Mark, who worked his way through several restaurant positions before achieving the position of Regional General Manager. The Morton's daughter, Tori, has also worked in positions throughout the company, and is presently in charge of purchasing for Miguelito's retail division. And the youngest son, Matt, will join the company when he retires from the United States Navy later this month.

The Brigantine Family of Restaurants currently operates fourteen restaurants in San Diego County, including seven Brigantine Seafood Restaurants, three Miguel's Cocinas, two Zócalos, Miguelito's in Coronado, and The Steakhouse at Azul La Jolla. Founded in 1969, The Brigantine Family of Restaurants will celebrate its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year.

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