

EATS

DINING FOR \$25 OR LESS

Fresh Fresh Seafood is hospitable

BY RICHARD GORELICK
[SPECIAL TO THE SUN]

SERVING UP HOME-COOKING AND hospitality, Darlene and Ricky Parker's Fresh Fresh Seafood feels Southern to me. Or maybe my own version of the South pieced together partly from real life, Eudora Welty stories and Mayberry.

Because I liked it so much, I'd rather you knew before heading there that the pace of a meal at Fresh Fresh Seafood is very relaxed. I mean it's slow. And your friends might be finishing their scallop dinner and mixed seafood before you ever see your crab cake. But I bet that you won't end up minding very much. Ricky Parker's seafood is good stuff, and a big part of an evening's pleasure here is basking in the warmth of Darlene Parker's performance as your host and server.

Consider the sheer delight she displays in having company over to eat her husband's food. There's something very charming about the way she endorses your menu selections — "that is nutritious" — and I know that I've never been asked in a restaurant (or in someone's home for that matter) whether I wanted my broccoli served "soft" or "crunchy," but that's what this place is like. I felt very much welcome and appreciated.

Across the street from the Recher Theatre, Fresh Fresh Seafood really isn't much to look at inside or out — you could pass by it every day without thinking to go in. But it's neat and clean, with a brightening blue mural on one wall. The dining area holds just a half-dozen small tables, although there's room for more.

The menu, except for a few stray items, is all fish and seafood, but it's more versatile than you might think one chef working alone could turn out of a small kitchen. Besides platters of grilled or fried fish and shellfish, Fresh Fresh Seafood offers stuffed tilapia and orange roughy, a sprinkling of rice-based dishes and stir-fries, and a selection of subs and sandwiches. There is also the simple alternative of a catch-of-the-day, which can be grilled, broiled or fried.

There are four soups, but we didn't get to try the Maryland crab soup because folks who attend the nearby weekly farmers' market had come in and bought it all up. But a cup of New England clam chowder (\$3.95) is good and buttery, if maybe just a little too thick. The appetizer to get here is fried shrimp (\$6.50/dozen), which are butterflied before they're breaded and fried. It's funny how easy it is to tell when something's homemade, and these definitely were, with a sweet and crunchy result.

A scallop platter (\$15.50 with two sides) is very simple and pleasing: big, tender sea scallops adroitly grilled and lightly sauced with a zippy lemon-pepper preparation. A mixed seafood sandwich (\$7) is a bread-busting extravaganza of fried fish, shrimp, clam strips and crab, served on a crusty roll and with the



Not surprisingly, the menu at Fresh Fresh Seafood is mostly fish and seafood. Shown here is the seafood platter.

PHOTOS BY BARBARA HADDOCK TAYLOR [SUN PHOTOGRAPHER]



Wife and husband Darlene and Ricky Parker own Fresh Fresh Seafood on York Road in Towson. She is the host and server; he is the chef.

Parker will say nothing except that it's "mystic."

I think the crab cake (\$18) here is a real contender. It turns out to be less of a cake than a golden expanse of delicately seasoned crab meat. Go for the lump version in favor of the jumbo lump version, and you'll get a better idea of how talented Ricky Parker is with seasoning.

We tried some wonderful sides with our meals, including broccoli made our way (crunchy); hand-chopped cole slaw, creamy

FRESH FRESH SEAFOOD

Where: 507 York Road, Towson

Call: 410-821-3474

Prices: Appetizers \$4.25-\$7.95, entrees \$11.95-\$26.95

Open: 11 a.m.-8 p.m. Monday through Saturday, noon-5 p.m. Sunday

Credit cards: MasterCard, Visa, Diners Club, Discover

Food: ★★★

Ambience: ★★

Service: ★★½

[Outstanding: ★★★★★ Good: ★★★ Fair or uneven: ★★ Poor ★]

mac-and-cheese, not fancied up with lobster or gourmet cheese, but plainly delicious with melting orange cheese over corkscrew noodles, seasoned liberally with what tasted like white pepper.

The marketers who had bought up the crab soup had also taken away all of the rice pudding and bread pudding. But in the summertime, the dessert to get at Fresh Fresh Seafood is a hot-fudge sundae, with soft ice cream and thick sauce, both from Hoffman's in Carroll County — a big finish to a big,