

Boston

Highland Kitchen Owner Will Rekindle East Coast Grill

By Jacqueline Cain
April 15, 2016



When Mark Romano heard the heartbreaking news that East Coast Grill would close this year after a 30-year-run, he decided to do something about it. The chef/owner of Highland Kitchen—who met his wife, Marci Joy, when she was a server at the Inman Square landmark—plans to reopen East Coast Grill later this summer.

Romano and Joy debuted their first ownership venture, the Southern-inspired, neighborhood spot, in 2007. Romano had worked at East Coast grill for a few years in the early 1990s, and helped ECG founder Chris Schlesinger open the Blue Room in 1992. Joy was a server at East Coast Grill.

“We’re in our eighth year now at Highland. We’ve looked around a bit [at locations to open another concept],” he says. “I think everybody was bummed out [East Coast Grill] closed. When it came up for sale, I talked to Chris, talked to Jason [Heard, East Coast Grill chef/owner from 2012-2016], and we made it all happen.”

Romano is scheduled for a licensing hearing to take over the Cambridge Street space next week, Boston Restaurant Talk first reported. He expects to seek state approval in May, and close on the property once all the necessary licenses are in place. After an estimated month of “cleaning and any renovations we need to do,” Romano hopes to reopen East Coast Grill in late July or early August.

“We’ll keep the feel and vibe the same. We’ll try to modernize the bar program a little, and spiff it up a little bit,” he says.

As far as the menu goes, expect a return of iconic East Coast Grill dishes like tuna and pork dumplings, jerk wings, barbecue platters, raw bar items, and the grilled mahi mahi. In general, though, Romano’s East Coast Grill will have less of a seafood focus than Schlesinger and Heard’s menu did. The legendary Hell Night—multiple courses of outrageously spicy food—could also return, though Romano says the team will need time to get its bearings before they plan those events.

Romano is still connected with many former East Coast Grill employees, so some familiar faces could return to the restaurant. He also plans to enlist the help of some of his Highland Kitchen staffers, including potentially bar master Joe McGuirk, who may consult on the new cocktail program.

East Coast Grill, 1271 Cambridge St., Cambridge, eastcoastgrill.net.