

Feb. 11, 2019 - Jeeves, I believe that I will take lunch on The Veraanda, today!

As I have written previously, one of the main things that I partake of, during my almost daily flights, is the opportunity to enjoy an early breakfast or a late lunch at one of the airfield restaurants that adorn many airports here in South Florida. Having a meal at an airside eatery is both convenient and efficient as there little mobilization beyond taxing up to the establishment, turning off the ignition key and walking the few steps to their entrance. However every once and a while I opt for a bit more elegant and adventuresome dining experience which may have me, after landing, journeying for another mile or two ...or even more. Most of the time this extra ground is covered by foot, such as the times when I visit the Seminole Indian Casino at Immokalee to enjoy of one of their humungous New York style Boars Head Deli sandwiches. That one involves an almost 4 mile round trip walk, if I choose to ignore the Casino's free courtesy van pick-up, which I often do to help burn up calories from the meal. The walk over to the Smokehouse Grill, at Westgate's River (Dude) Ranch, is almost as long with its 3 mile round trip walk, (although sometimes I am able to garner a golf-cart ride back to their air strip from one of the security people, who are dressed as old timey cowboy lawmen complete with sheriff's badge and realistic looking faux six-shooters strapped to their gun-belts). And, when I fly into Fort Myers Page Field, the walk over to Mel's (1950's era) Diner is about a 2 1/2 mile round trip. However on today's flight over to Page, I was going to try something different. I had heard of an upscale restaurant offering excellent dining in a 1902 built home located in Fort Myers' old Historic downtown district by the name of **The Veranda**. This house was originally constructed by Manuel Gonzalez, son of Captain Manuel Gonzalez who was stationed at the Fort in the mid 1800's. The Gonzalez son ran a Trading Post business and his wife was the first teacher in the little community that began to develop around the Fort.



Young Manuel Gonzales built two houses at the corner of second St. & Broadway, one occupied by he and his family, and the second adjacent house having been built for his mother. The two houses were joined in the late 1960's by the original kitchen building from the second house and a tropical garden courtyard to create the restaurant and bar. The original covered carriage portico now serves as their main entrance and one can imagine the pomp and elegance as the community's elite would drive their two team horse drawn carriages under the roof overhang and exit to be received for a formal lunch or dinner. This is the same portico that I drove the courtesy crew car, provided me by the Fixed Base Operator at Page Field for free usage up to two hours during my visit



to their beautiful business jet center. Their only caveat was that I avail myself of their very reasonably priced AvGas upon my return later that afternoon. The current going rate for aviation fuel in the South Florida area is around \$5.00 per gallon but this FBO was charging only \$3.55 if I would pump it myself. Since my airplane is fabric covered I make it a point to only do self-serve and other than having to utilize a supplied ladder to reach my wing-top tanks, it is really no more difficult than filling up one's car. It is only a 5 mile trip from the airport to the restaurant, which took just 12 minutes during the light mid-day traffic. The Veranda's parking lot was, however, completely full, so I had to park in the city lot just across the street, which cost me a total of 78 cents for my hour and a half visit. Once inside the restaurant I had a 15 minute wait for an outside table, which time gave me the opportunity to study the dozens and dozens of historic black and white photographs that adorned the lobby walls.





There is also inside sitting available but it was such a beautiful day that I wanted to avail myself of the delightful outside courtyard dining. It was well worth the 10 minutes that it actually took for me to be seated at one of their umbrella shaded linen covered tables for four to six people. While mainly a dinner venue, they had a nicely varied lunch menu with entree pricing from 12 to 18 dollars and a variety of appetizers, soups and salads plus a number of delicious sounding deserts to complete the meal. I opted for the most expensive item on their lunch offering, three Blue Crab-cakes with a Remoulade sauce and a side salad. If I was going to spend \$25 for lunch, it was going to be for a worthy one. While seated at a table adjoining their very active Japanese koi pond and waterfall, I had the opportunity to enjoy

my surroundings and to take in the nice mid-seventy degrees weather along with a pleasant breeze. However that breeze was going to be my bane for my return flight as it would develop into a fairly strong headwind of 20 MPH which would add 14 minutes to my en-route time home. I will say that I have definitely had better crab cakes than what was served. They were too heavily breaded and were somewhat overcooked. I believe that an alternate of pan seared sea scallops and a cup of baked onion soup would have been a better selection, possibility for my next visit to *The Veranda*. Unfortunately I now only seem to get over to Fort Myers a few times each year. I don't know if that is because the 2 1/2 hour round trip of 220 miles or so just takes too much time or that I have found even cheaper airplane gas a lot closer in. And, speaking of my return flight, I did come across an unusual phenomenon of nature. In a burn-off of one of the sugar cane fields the dense rising smoke from the fire reached a height where it's top developed into an actual cloud. While I was at an altitude of 5,500 feet I suspect that the warm and humid rising air reached its dew point and visible moisture (a cloud) formed. In the photo directly below you can see the transparent wispy gray colored smoke suddenly turns into a opaque white and well formed cumulous cloud. This was pretty much the only low level cloud encountered along my route and is probably of interest only to those pilots amongst my readers.

