

Hundreds coming for annual restaurant, lodging meeting

By Patrick Donohue
(850) 654-8445
pdonohue@link.freedom.com

Key leaders of the state's most important industry are coming to Destin.

The Florida Restaurant and Lodging Association, an organization that represents 10,000 hotels and restaurants across the state, chose Destin as the site for its annual fishing tournament and its summer board of directors meeting.

The event, which will be co-hosted by Legendary Inc. and the Emerald Grande high-rise towers that overlook Destin's harbor, will be a chance for the heavy-hitters of the state's tourism and hospitality industries to see what Destin and Northwest Florida have to offer, said Bruce Craul, the chief financial officer at Legendary.

Craul serves as the Panhandle representative on the association's board of directors and said that in the more than 50-year history of the organization, it has never held an event or a meeting in Northwest Florida.

The fishing tournament, he

"We were looking for great fishing, beautiful beaches and meeting venues suitable to entertain our board of directors."

Kate Murphy,
spokeswoman

said, was traditionally held in the Florida Keys but after a lackluster experience at the tournament, Craul decided to make the push to bring the tournament and the meeting to Destin.

The tournament and the meeting will bring as many as 450 people to the Emerald Grande and to Destin for the four-day event, starting with the board of directors meetings which begin on Saturday, June 9.

Restaurant association spokeswoman Kate Murphy said Destin had all of the amenities the organization looks for in a host.

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entertain our board of directors.

The Destin area is home to one of our state's largest charter fleets and the HarborWalk marina provided

the ideal setting for our tournament and the surrounding parties," she said. "Destin also boasts some of the finest dining establishments the state has to offer, making the city a perfect backdrop of showcasing the Gulf Coast to the culinary elite that make up the FRLA membership."

The fishing tournament

will begin on Monday, June 11, with a "Low Country Boil" on the Captain's Deck poolside area at Emerald Grande for anglers and event sponsors.

Anglers will depart from Destin's harbor at 7 a.m. and return at 1:30 p.m. for a weigh-in and a "Rock the Docks" party, with Legendary chefs preparing the fish

caught by the anglers.

Craul said he hopes the event becomes an annual tradition for the restaurant association, for Legendary and for Destin.

"Tourism is the No. 1 industry in the state of Florida and to have the leaders of that industry coming to Destin is pretty exciting," he said.