

How Legal Sea Foods arrived at Milford for its new food lab, training center

Tom Benoit for The Milford Daily News – Oct. 3, 2023

MILFORD — Thanks to innovation and friendship, Milford will soon be home to a "center of excellence" for one of the region's most popular casual-dining seafood restaurants.

Boston-based [Legal Sea Foods'](#) parent company, [PPX Hospitality Brands](#), recently provided more details to the Daily News about its plans for a new facility on Fortune Boulevard. Its proposal was approved by the [Planning Board](#) in September, although there are still hurdles to clear.

"We plan to run a full-service commissary for all of our local restaurants," said Matt King, Legal Sea Foods' brand president and chief culinary officer. "It's where we'll make the chowders, stocks, sauces and soups. We dry-age our beef for Smith & Wollensky on-site and cut steaks for Legal Sea Foods and Strega." [Smith & Wollensky](#), a high-end steakhouse chain, and [Strega Italiano](#), which specializes in Italian fare, are also restaurants owned and operated by PPX Hospitality.



Medway resident Matt King is brand president and chief culinary officer of Legal Sea Foods. Gregg Derr/The Patriot Ledger

Milford operation to feature food lab, studio and training facility

King described the still-to-be-built facility as a "center of excellence." He said the Milford operation will also include a food lab, where oysters and meat can be tested for safety as well as a studio to film training

videos for PPX-owned restaurants. A full bar and kitchen set-up will be used to bring in staff for training. The spot will also provide a venue for quality control, e-commerce and retail fulfillment.

"We're excited," said King, who lives in Medway. "We plan on employing locally and hiring about 30 people from warehouse employees to cooks to supervisors and managers. The job opportunities should be nice for the town."

Earlier, Legal Sea Foods applied for a change of use permit to construct a 26,550-square-foot facility within an existing one-story building at 393 Fortune Blvd. The property is owned by [Clarke Distribution](#), a luxury appliance retailer and distributor of Sub-Zero, Wolf and Cove brands that has operated an appliance showroom on Fortune Boulevard for more than a decade.

Friendship with the Clarke family sparked opportunity

King said he's had a friendship with the Clarke family for about 12 years, which is how the site became an opportunity for Legal Sea Foods after it faced the challenge of an outdated quality control center. According to PPX's news release, the Clarke facility also houses a hydroponic farm providing fresh produce and herbs year-round and a solar panel array on the roof that has produced net-zero electricity usage for more than a decade.

In a statement sent to the Daily News by a public relations firm representing Clarke, President Sean Clarke said that he and King "have built a relationship that allows us to identify mutually beneficial initiatives."

"It's a great relationship and when he brought up the need for a new innovation center, the wheels started turning," Clarke said in the statement. "Whenever we can help each other, we are in full-go mode. We're thrilled that we had room in our Milford building that suited their needs and look forward to seeing this exciting project come to fruition for both of us."

Approval still needed from Milford Building Department

Legal Sea Foods' proposal requested minor exterior modifications as well as the installation of a 5,000-gallon underground grease trap. Plans are for the new facility to operate from 5 a.m. to 5 p.m., five days a week.

[Milford Town Planner Larry Dunkin](#) previously said Legal Sea Foods still needs to go through a permitting process with Milford's Building Department. He called the Planning Board's change of use approval a "starting point."

King told the Daily News last week that the company is expecting to submit final plans this week for Building Department approval. He anticipates a four- to six-week building period, with an opening date planned for early next year.

"Having Legal Sea Foods and PPX join us here in Milford is the icing on the cake," Clarke said in his statement. "We love the culinary synergy and look forward to where this will take our companies."

Legal Sea Foods started as a fish market in Cambridge some 70 years ago, according to PPX's website. It now operates restaurants throughout the East Coast, including 20 in Massachusetts.