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Meghan McClure

University of Arkansas, Fayetteville

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The quick service food and beverage line of business and how it is aligned with the overall objectives for the Walt Disney World® Resort and The Walt Disney Company

by

Meghan McClure

Advisor: Craig Geiger

An Honors Thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Bachelor of Science in International Business in Management.

**Sam M. Walton College of Business
University of Arkansas
Fayetteville, Arkansas**

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Introduction:

This summer, I interned at Walt Disney World Resort on the Disney College Program as a Food and Beverage Cast Member. Walt Disney World Resort features four theme parks — the Magic Kingdom® Park, Epcot®, Disney's Hollywood Studios™, and Disney's Animal Kingdom® Theme Park. The Walt Disney Resort is one of the top tourist destinations in the world and Magic Kingdom Park was the most visited theme park in the world in 2022, with attendance of over twenty-one million people, and a total attendance of over fifty-eight million visitors across all four parks. Walt Disney World Resort covers over 27,000 acres of Florida land (over twice the size of the city of Manhattan and the same size as San Francisco). Throughout the Disney World Resort there are over 77,000 Cast Members, making it the biggest single-site employer in the United States.

The Disney College Program allows for many opportunities, such as instructor lead offerings, experiential learning, career path development, and academic support. This internship gives us hands-on work in a global company but also helps us further ourselves in our career by providing networking opportunities and behind-the-scenes access to things others may never experience. This experience is what will make us stand out to employers in the future. The Disney name is a powerful one and having the opportunity to work in this company can open many doors in the future.

Another highlight about this internship is the ability to meet so many different people, from guests to coworkers to leaders, everyone is different, and no one has the same story or path. Nowhere else are people able to come into so many different people in such a short amount of

time – allowing us to learn from others in a way unlike almost any other. It is our job to create happiness by providing entertainment to people of all ages everywhere. Cast members do this through the five keys: Safety, courtesy, inclusion, show, and efficiency. Each of these keys are what help differentiate the Disney company from other companies. The dedication to ultimate guest experience is what has allowed Disney theme parks to be the number one vacation spot in the United States.

As an intern in Food and Beverage, it was my job to provide not just food but experiences to guests from all around the world. It was my job not only to make sure guests left the restaurant locations happy, but also to maximize production. To do this, all workers had to perform at their highest potential. My responsibilities as an intern included:

- Supervise employment extending classroom based occupational learning at on-the-job learning stations
- Deliver service to thousands of guests each day at Pinocchio's Village Haus and surrounding complexes in Disney's Magic Kingdom
- Take initiatives to receive additional training and demonstrate specific property awareness by investigating the brand and uniqueness of the area
- Network with supervisors and other cast members to write an honors thesis on the company and experience

The interview process for this internship consisted of a general application, a web-based interview, and a phone interview. Additionally, each of these steps were done in waves. Because the College Program involves students from across the country, high levels of organization are

crucial in the hiring process. Disney has an entire team dedicated solely to recruitment and a group inside that works solely on hiring for the Disney College Program. After passing the general application, waves for web-based interviews would go out the next Monday. After the web-based interview, you were immediately told if you received a phone interview. Following my web-based interview, I had my phone interview with recruiter Jessica. After the phone interview there was a long period of waiting where no one really knew what to expect. Over the next few months, waves went out sporadically of acceptances and rejections.

Internship Project Background

This internship was a six-month long experience working hands-on in different food service locations of the Magic Kingdom Park. It was unique in that it was completely unlike other more typical style internships. This internship had me interact directly with guests and other cast members to measure ways to improve efficiency and identify areas of improvement. My primary location was at a restaurant called Pinocchio Village Haus (see Figure 1), where I worked in every position, ranging from front of house to back of house. I also worked at four different surrounding locations that were a bit smaller, and these places included: Gaston's Tavern, Storybook Treats, The Friar's Nook, and Prince Eric's Market (see Figures 3 through Figure 6), and these locations were known as Fantasyland Stands when grouped together. During my program, I also had the opportunity to work in Epcot, in a restaurant called the Regal Eagle. This helped me gain a perspective on what restaurants in other parks were doing differently than in the Magic Kingdom.

There is a critical difference in food locations in Walt Disney World. There are two main food "locations." These are restaurants and quick service locations. Quick service locations can be compared to fast food restaurants, where a guest will come in, order food at a register, and take the food and sit down somewhere. Restaurant-style locations are more sit-down style, with a waiter that takes your order and delivers your food to your table, and these experiences last at least an hour. Restaurant-style locations also usually require a reservation whereas quick service locations may have a line, but there is no reservation or wait to be seated. These quick service locations are incredibly appealing to guests who are trying to maximize their day, fitting in as much as they can do into their limited time in the park. Quick service locations are also much

cheaper in price ranges than sit-down style restaurants, which appealed to people of different income levels who may not have the money to spend a ton extra once they got into the park. Prices for a full meal at most quick service locations do not go above fifteen dollars per meal, which is relatively much cheaper than prices at sit-down restaurants, which usually are above twenty to twenty-five dollars each.

One unexpected thing about working with food was how I realized the importance of its involvement in the theme park experience. Disney has strategically increased the amount of food as well as the quality of its food over the years to appeal more to guests and their diverse wants. If one thinks back to Walt Disney World in the early 2000's, guests who vacationed there may remember the fairly sparse food choices – there was chicken strips and objectively gross pizza that compared to microwave or oven pizza one could make back at home. Over the past few years, with the refurbishment of many park attractions, the food in Walt Disney World has also undergone an extensive overhaul. It is now more diverse, caters to many food needs, and one can usually find whatever food they are craving somewhere in the park. Just the food at locations that I worked ranged from pizza to cinnamon rolls to hot dogs to barbecue to even more.

The Magic Kingdom has comparatively more quick service locations than it has merchandise locations, and even has more food stops than rides in the park. Disney invests in these locations for many reasons. The most obvious, but also one of the most important reasons is that food is such a necessity for survival. If Disney only had a few locations for food scattered variously throughout the park, it would look like the company does not really value the immediate interests of guests. Obviously, guests will come to ride rides and meet characters, but they also need to be

fueled to be able to do so, and having these locations all around the parks shows guests that Disney is committed to meeting their needs. They also invest in quick service locations as much as they do because it is a point of sure profit. People are always hungry and will buy food if they get hungry enough. A family on a tight budget may limit themselves to the merchandise they buy, but they are sure to buy at least a couple of food items on their trips. The markup on prices compared to the cost of ingredients allow these locations to turn a small profit each time a guest buys food.

The Business Model of the Disney College Program

The Disney College Program first began in 1980 and has since grown to become a well-known and highly desired program among many college students. There are over 50,000 applicants to the Disney College Program each year, and Disney accepts only around 12,000 of those people. Participants are paid hourly, starting at \$14 per hour, and for those working in quick service in the Magic Kingdom, they receive a bit more - \$14.75 per hour. Each participant must be available seven days a week and at all hours, including holidays, weekends, overtime, and more. College Program participants have the option to opt into Disney housing, known as Flamingo Crossings (see Figure 7) where they live for the duration of their program. Once they opt in, a portion of each check will go towards the rent, which is taken weekly from their ending paystub.

The business model of the Disney College Program is extremely smart and well thought out but is only really advantageous for the company, not for program participants. Each week, more than \$250 is taken from each participant to go towards their rent. When working 40-hour weeks, that can account for more than half of all their earnings. There were people scheduled less than 40-hour weeks that ended up only having about \$100 to live off that week. For quick service, I was always scheduled at least 40 hours (about 1 and a half days), and sometimes I was above 50 hours (about 2 days) each week. Shift lengths ranged from six hours to thirteen hours on my longest days, and some days there was only an eight-hour turnaround between my last shift and my shift the next day.

The Disney company bases their hourly workers off something known as the “point system.” The point system is in place to keep people accountable, and it makes sense in theory, but for

College Program cast members, it can be their downfall. Arriving late at work results in a half point on your record card, and missing a full day is one point. After receiving three points, a cast member will receive something called a reprimand. If a cast member receives four reprimands, then they are immediately terminated. A half point can also be received if a cast member does not clock out within a certain ten-minute time span in Magic Kingdom, and within a two-minute time span in the other parks. Full-time and part-time workers are a part of the Disney union, and have extreme leniency with these points because they are able to dispute them if there is a reason they should not have received the point. But since College Program participants are not allowed to be part of this union, they have no power with these points. If they receive a point for any reason, it will be on their record card forever.

One of the largest draws of joining the Disney College program is that participants get free park admission. So, if they have time off, they can walk into any of the Disney parks free of cost. But this does not extend to the things inside the parks, like food and merchandise. This is another strategy of Disney corporation. While half of participant's paycheck goes towards rent, the other half goes right back into the parks. Since participants know that they are only going to have access to the parks for a five-to-seven-month period, they want to make the most of it. They go to the parks on their limited time off and spend most of the money they have earned on food and merch. At the end of the program, most people do not leave with much more than they started with, unless they are consciously trying to save their money. If they choose not to spend their money, then they can miss fun and exciting activities that other people are part of, and many do not want to do that.

So, almost all of participant's money goes back into Disney, they take Disney transportation, they live on Disney property – everything in their lives revolves around Disney for at least a solid five months. They eat, sleep, and breathe Disney, and it can be a hard and sometimes challenging experience for many. For those who stick it out though, it can be one of the most rewarding experiences of a lifetime and offers both a unique experience and gives participants something that sets them apart from others heading into their careers in the future.

Personal Learning Objectives

While working, my leaders and I worked together to develop personal learning objectives as well as project objectives for myself that I would work towards while on my program. At the end of the program, I reported back to them on my progress on each of these objectives. My personal objectives are listed below:

- The highlight of the guest experience within the Disney Company
- My perception of the quick service processes, benefits, and experiences from back and front of house and in multiple parks
- How I play a role in the guest experience and how I delivered results to customers, my management and to Disney

The first personal objective we established was understanding the value of the guest experience within the Disney Company. One thing Disney specifically highlights is the ability to create “magical moments.” Magical moments are times when cast members can do things for guests that guests would not typically do or achieve on their own. For example, at Storybook Treats, I was able to give out a free ice cream cone to a family of my choosing. These moments allow guests to have a little “magic” added to their days, but also give us a moment to connect with them on a more personal level. For example, when I gave out the ice cream cone to the family I chose, I did not choose them with any particular rhyme or reason, they just looked like a regular family visiting the parks. But as I talked to them, I found out the mom used to be a cast member, and even though they could only visit for the day, they wanted to come back and see how things had changed and relive a couple of old memories. These small moments show how much guest

experience matters for the Disney company, and how we work to make the guest experience the crucial point of a vacation.

During colder weather, we would alter some of our actions to make sure the guests could maintain an enjoyable experience. For example, during Christmas parties, almost every guest wanted hot chocolate, when before they were only getting cookies because it was too hot outside for hot chocolate. Due to these new desires of guests, we had to institute changes into how we prepare for shifts, especially the Christmas parties. Before, we would stock the warmers with hot chocolate, and it would be fine to get us through the initial rush. Instead, to make sure we did not hold on hot chocolate, we stocked the warmers, but also the warmer machines in the back, and filled the window with hot chocolate three rows high. This change, although a bit arduous, kept us from holding on to hot chocolate and keeps guests happy. These minor changes that can be tiring for us can have big impacts on the guest's experience. Even if the guests do not realize the change or the extra work we put in to make their experience better, they still walk away happier than if we had not instituted those changes in the first place.

My perception of the quick service processes, benefits, and experiences from back and front of house and in multiple parks was another objective to analyze. Since I had the opportunity to work in so many roles and positions, I obtained key insights that shaped my perception of these processes. Overall, Disney aims to have great service, and if one person is not where they need to be, it can affect the quality of interaction a guest has with the restaurant and the entire day. For example, there is a position called catcher responsible for calling pizzas needed as they come and catching them out of the oven. One night, the catcher was helping other cast members right

before close, but since there was no one there to call pizzas, we ran out right when a small rush came through. A lot of people ended up having to stay past their scheduled time because of this. It was a small demonstration and a good reminder of just how important every person is in the machine that is the back of house. No matter how small or unimportant the role seems, it can have large effects in the end.

Each location had similar roles, but also was unique in the processes it used. At Pinocchio Village Haus, everything was very separated, with people in the front, the back, others managing cash, and others on registers (see Figure 2). These are all distinct roles with no crossover. At stands, all of them are combined into one role, and everyone can do all of these activities in one day. I was also able to work in EPCOT at a quick service location called the Regal Eagle. It was a remarkably interesting experience, especially when compared to my experience in Magic Kingdom. The processes were similar, with a bit different of a set up. The main difference was that they served alcohol. Magic Kingdom is a dry park, so no alcohol is sold at any of the locations I consistently work. The role was similar to Stands, where people up front did almost all activities, but there was also a separate kitchen staff, which was more similar to work at Pinocchio Village Haus. The management was also quite different. For example, the coordinators were seen less, and it seemed like there were much less of them than in my locations. I attributed it to the fact that there was much less for them to handle.

My final personal objective was to determine how I delivered results to customers, my management and to Disney and how I specifically played a role in the guest experience. As cast members, it was our job first to make guests happy, and if they were not, to try and turn that

around for them. This is a primary way we work to deliver results to customers and Disney.

Making connections with guests, and personalizing each interaction was both a primary way I played a role in the guest experience, but also in delivering results to my management and to Disney. These interactions would define the vacation guests had, and it was critical that we put effort into making them positive and memorable.

Project Objectives

The other objectives I had were centered around my project. My projective objectives included:

- Understand and analyze the structure and operations of Walt Disney World, specifically in quick service food and beverage
- What are the objectives of Disney's quick service line
- What do quick service locations accomplish for guests
- Why does Disney invest in quick service locations compared to other lines of business in the parks

The first project objective I had was understanding the structure and operations of the quick service food and beverage line. In the food and beverage line of business, the structure differs from other areas of the park. It is structured as a main workers, coordinators, leaders, and then proprietors in the direct line. Coordinators are always on location, with around five working at one time. Each one has a different job each day, ranging from allergies, where that coordinator manages and makes all allergy orders for that day, to managing CDS, which is the positioning software for main workers. There is only one leader on location at a time and they are responsible for all the goings-on during that day at that specific spot. The proprietor is the manager of all locations in one land. So, our proprietor is the proprietor for all of Fantasyland Food and Beverage, meaning he is responsible for every food location in Fantasyland.

The second project objective we established was to determine the purposes of Disney's quick service line. These purposes were simple but also changed with different events and times of the day. For example, during normal times, the quick service line's ultimate purpose was to deliver food fast and effectively. We did that by having people in every position that could be filled, and

each position was responsible for primarily one task. For example, if one was on the “window” position, their primary responsibility was to make sure the food on the tray matched the food on the ticket. If one was in a dining room position, their key responsibility was to wipe tables and take out trash. These positions accomplished the ultimate goals of the quick service line to get everything done in a timely and high-quality manner.

Contrarily, during things like Mickey’s Very Merry Christmas Party, the quick service objective shifted. The objective of Disney’s quick service line is a bit different during Christmas Parties than during regular hours. Our objectives during Christmas parties are to make sure there is enough product for guests, manage guest flow, and maintain the safety of guests as they go through. While the quantity of guests in the park is the same or even less during these parties, the foot traffic through our restaurant is heightened. It is critical that we keep the crowd moving while also keeping them safe. To do so, we station people all along the walkway welcoming but also directing guests clearly and precisely on where to go. Due to the rain, we also had people constantly mopping the floors to try and limit spills and slips. In the back, we had people assigned to both Cocoa and cookies, with each person doing a highly specific task, ranging from filling the cups to putting the tops on to bringing product to the window.

Another project objective was determining what quick service locations accomplish for guests. As I progressed in my time at Disney, I realized how different each quick service location is, and each one has a slightly unique goal for guests. Gaston’s Tavern, a cinnamon roll and coffee shop, gives guests a slight pick-me-up and gives them an incredibly immersive experience while they eat. Storybook Treats, an ice cream shop, gives guests a small bit of “magic” when they buy a

sweet treat. Friar's Nook gives them unique menu choices that one would not originally think of even existing. Each location, while providing guests with these different experiences, all accomplish something similar for the guests that visit them: a lasting memory. These things seem so small in the moment, but when looked back on, they are specific things that a guest can recall about their vacations to Walt Disney World.

The last key objective to analyze was why Disney invests in quick service locations compared to other lines of business in the parks. Quick service as a whole is much more convenient for guests than sit-down restaurants. As fun and as nice as some of the sit-down restaurants are at the Disney parks, they take a substantial portion of time out of the guests' days. Additionally, they can be quite expensive, with dining reservations at Cinderella's castle being more than \$200 just for the reservation itself. A quick service restaurant enables guests to have a place to sit for a bit, cool off and eat, but does not take out a significant part of their day. Meals are also much less expensive, averaging about \$20 per person on the higher end. Pizzas at Pinocchio Village Haus are \$12.99, which although may seem expensive for a pizza, is on the cheaper end for a full meal at the Disney parks. Investing in these locations brings in as much or more profit as the more expensive sit-down style restaurants, as the turnover rate is higher and the expenses for the food itself are lower.

Project details – Actions

A unique aspect of this internship was the flexibility I had. I created my own project and initiatives based on loose outlines I received from my leaders. Since I was placed in food service, I settled on focusing the project direction on how the food service line aligns with the Walt Disney World corporation's values and how it can be improved to be more efficient and effective. Creating a project like this required quite a bit of working with my leaders and even my proprietor.

Together we settled on the analysis of the quick service line of business at Walt Disney World Resort, specifically in the Magic Kingdom. Quick service fast-food type restaurants sometimes have a stigma around them, and Disney actively works to tear down those stigmas and make sure guests understand and know their commitment to them, even in such a fast-paced and food-centered environment. My primary role was to work hands-on with the other cast members and evaluate my experiences and find things that could be improved upon. I reported back to my leaders at regular intervals and had a final presentation at the end.

My experience began in the back of house role, where I learned the ins and outs of the kitchen environment, and how workflow was carried out each day. This gave me incredible insight into the behind-the-scenes actions that I would use when I started working in guest-facing roles. After about a month of working with cast members in the back, I started my front of house training. This was when I used a lot of my experience in the back and implemented it into my experiences in the front. Evaluating the relationship between front and back of house and how that played into the effectiveness of the dining experience. Once I got a bit of experience in the front is when

I received my stands training. This was a combination of the two roles into one and was much more guest interaction than the previous two roles. It was also the role that required the most problem-solving and quick-thinking. Having experience in these three roles that were all a part of the quick service line helped me in the end to make my conclusions on how the food service line aligns with the Walt Disney World corporation's values and how it can be improved to be more efficient and effective.

Project Results

At the end of my program was a final presentation to my leaders and to my proprietor. The final presentation's goal was to show how I accomplished my personal and project objectives and the key takeaways and conclusions from my project.

There were multiple key conclusions I was able to make from my six months at the Walt Disney World Resort. The first is that the Disney company has a strictness that other companies do not. Although I have worked in other restaurant settings as well as other jobs in general and have many friends that have worked in food before, the strictness surrounding work was unlike anything else I had experienced before. One of the most shocking things I experienced was the rules surrounding food. In other food places I have worked, we had the option to buy the food we served for our breaks, or in other places I had one free meal per shift, but at Disney, if you ate food without explicit permission from leaders (and we also were not allowed to ask for permission, they just had to give it to us when they felt like it), then it was grounds for immediate termination.

This is not to say, though, that the strictness and the rules that Disney had were not there for a reason. There is an innate need to always do your best when working for the Walt Disney Company, and by having rules to keep everyone performing at their best, they can maintain the positive customer experience that the company is known for.

Other incredibly strict responsibilities we had included but were not limited to no phones, you cannot leave your position for any reason, and arriving even one second late will be a point on

your record with no option of getting it removed. All of these were grounds for either immediate termination or a reprimand. These rules, while understandable in some senses, created an atmosphere of fear of sorts in the workplace. People were always on edge, because getting in trouble was so easy, and there was no real option of communicating about the issue before you were already being punished. I was once yelled at for accidentally not warming up enough soup, even though I had just been moved to that position. I was not even given the chance to communicate what had happened before I was suffering the consequences. One of the older men I worked with was fired one day with no explanation, and later we found out it was because he used too much balsamic glaze. This, I realized, is what most of the minimum wage workers in Disney parks experience every single day. Again, these rules are in place to maintain the reputation of the company as well as keep the workers safe. With so many employees, strict rules are necessary so that people do not get hurt.

The strictness that Disney has for its employees is meant to upkeep the standards of the company. Keeping a consistent image and keeping employees accountable is a huge part of the structure of the corporation, but this strictness also has no flexibility. It leads to negative consequences for the current workers despite benefiting the company.

Another observation from this experience was the priority Disney takes on the guest experience. They will always be the first priority. No matter what you are feeling that day, your ultimate responsibility is to the guest, not yourself. Making their day magical is your only priority when you step on stage. If a guest comes up and says they got the wrong food or do not like their order, you do not question it and get them something new or get them a refund immediately. This

priority is what makes Disney, Disney. They are known for their guest interactions and guest relations; it is part of what makes them such an iconic brand. Part of the reason people choose Disney over other amusement parks is because they know the treatment they get there will be unlike anything else. It is a refreshing change of pace from interactions that can happen outside the Disney bubble. The cast members at Disney are truly there for the guests and want them to leave happier than ever.

Key strengths I identified in Disney's quick service line of business were quick and efficient food delivery, prominent levels of guest satisfaction, consistent food quality, and the large workforce in each location. There was such an efficient assembly line of creating to plating that food could be made incredibly fast and efficiently. Even if there was a hold on something, guests never had to wait more than ten minutes for their food from the time of ordering to the time of pickup. It was well structured and a well-oiled machine. Guests left happy and full, and if they were unhappy with anything they got, a cast member immediately got them something else so they could walk out the door pleased with the experience. Food quality was always tested to make sure it was up to standard, and similarly to McDonalds, all food was sent out looking and tasting as similar as possible to each other. Finally, there was a large staff in each location to account for callouts, so even if many people did not show up for work, there were always enough people to run the complex.

In this meeting, I also made my final recommendations to my leaders on what could be improved within the food service industry. The primary recommendation I had was to have more open communication between workers and themselves. Each leader had a different leadership style and expectation, so each day, work processes flowed a little differently, and it led to quite a bit of

confusion and miscommunication instances. Something that was fine one day was not another and vice versa. Having clear communication, expectations, and consistency between all the leaders would lead to greater efficiency and worker satisfaction.

Another recommendation for the leaders was to make the cross-training list and order clearer. The cross-training list for workers was never actually seen except by select leaders, and it led to frustration and confusion. People were getting trained out of order or accidentally slipped off the list with no explanation. When I submitted to get cross-trained to Stands, I was taken off the list and was not told about it, which led to extreme frustration on my end because the people around me were getting their training and I was not. It was not until I talked to a specific leader that I found out that I had accidentally been taken off the list because they mixed me up with someone with the same name as me who left the company. There was not much communication in general between leaders and regular cast members, and this ended up frustrating a lot of workers and created unnecessary problems and tension in the workplace.

These were some of the key weaknesses I identified during my time as an intern. Different management styles can lead to malfunctions and mistakes throughout the day. Low communication levels caused slip ups and slowed down productivity. Accountability was difficult to maintain. By just opening communication a bit more and increasing consistency across leadership, employee satisfaction and work productivity would increase greatly.

The last step of my project was identifying areas of opportunity that can be capitalized on. I realized that the people working want to do new things and challenge themselves – doing the

same thing every day can be demoralizing and can lead to possible loss of employees. By allowing cast members to become trainers or to cross-train will boost morale and incentivize workers to do more. Giving them the opportunity to put in for these changes will give employees more drive and motivation to come to work each day, because they feel like they are growing in the company.

Another area of opportunity I identified was seemingly small but would bring in a lot more profit for Pinocchio Village Haus specifically - letting people/employees decide on the “new” pizza that rotates every few months. Since it was chefs from outside the restaurant creating the ideas for pizzas, the usual combination was extremely unpopular, and a lot of pizza ended up going to waste because no one was buying it. No one wanted what they were creating. Instead, allowing the “people” to decide on the pizza would create more sales since its people that eat the pizza deciding what to have. These are the people actually eating and making the pizza daily and are more “in touch” with the reality of consumer consumption. While having a creative and outlandish pizza seems fun in theory, if no one is willing to buy it, food and money goes to waste instead of making any profit for the company.

Appendix



Figure 1 – Front of Pinocchio Village Haus



Figure 2 – Inside of Pinocchio Village Haus



Figure 3 – Gaston's Tavern



Figure 4 – Storybook Treats



Figure 5 – Prince Eric's Market



Figure 6 – Friar's Nook



Figure 7 - Flamingo Crossing Village (Disney Housing)

Sources/Literature Review

Contact List

Person	Details
Joseph G Klein	Proprietor Fantasyland Food and Bev joseph.g.klein@disney.com
Cassandra R Miller	Guest Exp Mgr-Food & Beverage cassandra.miller@disney.com
Shane A Marks	Guest Exp Mgr-Food & Beverage shane.a.marks@disney.com

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