



Dom Miguel photos

It's little known that Dawn Duques, co-owner of the Madison Beach Hotel, overcame a learning disability to have a teaching career where she could reach out to others. Below, right, staff gets the outside ready for diners; left, Duques talks to a staffer whom she is teaching English as a second language.

# On the MENU

## English lessons & eggs Benedict

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By Lisa Reisman  
Special to the Times

**WHAT DO ENGLISH LESSONS AND SUNDAY BRUNCH HAVE IN COMMON?** Not what you might think.

Spend a little time with Dawn Duques,

co-owner of the Madison Beach Hotel, though, and it should become clear.

To mark the end of summer and to thank the community for their support, the hotel is offering special giveaways during their Sunday brunch this Labor Day weekend.

It's Sunday Brunch by the Beach. But it isn't just brunch - it's part of Dawn Duques' larger mission for everyone on the Shoreline



to enjoy the newly rebuilt hotel with a raffle that includes prizes like free spa treatments, brunch for two, and an overnight stay. Naturally, there will be the usual offerings of everything from eggs Benedict, to raw bar, (and every nosh in between)

cocktails, plus live entertainment.

Not that Duques would take credit for the idea. She isn't one to seek out attention.

Take the overcast

morning in early August when the well-coiffed, impeccably dressed wisp of a woman that is Dawn Duques was inconspicuously finishing her cup of tea at the hotel's Wharf Restaurant and glancing at her watch.

Duques needed to



have a few words with a housekeeper. No, it didn't involve a reprimand. For the record, she's thrilled with the staff.

Quietly, a few times a week throughout the summer, she's been giving her English lessons.

"I love ESL," said the young-looking, 68-year-old grandmother of six, referring to the program for teaching English to non-native speakers, her eyes lively behind her wireless glasses. "You're providing a person with a lifeline for surviving in this country. Surviving and succeeding."

For anyone with even a passing acquaintance with her biography or, for that matter, her seemingly boundless energy, it will come as no surprise that, in addition to overseeing the design of the hotel's interior and exterior, Duques is willing to carve out the time to teach. This is a woman who, as a young mother of triplets and an older son, directed a school for continuing education for both children and adults in the Tenafly, N.J., school district. It

See ENGLISH, Page 10

# English lessons: Duques aims to help others succeed

From page 9  
offered more than 170 classes, from ESL to finance to affordable SAT preparation.

Ask her how she managed all that and she'll

casually mention the before- and after-school childcare program for latchkey kids she was directing at the same time. She established that program herself. Single

parents, professional families, it didn't matter.

"These kids were going home to empty houses," she said. "They needed supervision and structure. Too many children

fall through the cracks, because some adult has not figured out how to relate to them."

Duques can speak with authority on this. For her, that adult was her fourth-grade teacher. As a schoolgirl in Tenafly, the woman who would go on to earn a master's at Columbia University's Teachers College and a doctorate in education, was, by her own admission, "not the best student." No matter how long she studied, she couldn't keep up.

Dyslexia was poorly understood back then. It would be years before research showed there was no relation between intelligence and the brain

pattern that distinguishes the disorder.

That's where that fourth-grade teacher came in. Each morning 9-year-old Dawn Duques went to school an hour early to work with her teacher. "I was so lucky to have someone like that," she said, looking out at the veranda peopled with guests and restaurant-goers against the backdrop of Long Island Sound. "Someone who showed me I wasn't slow, that I could overcome my learning disability, but that I'd have to work that much harder."

If her fourth-grade teacher planted in her a seed of confidence, it was in the nurturing environment of New London's Mitchell College that her love of learning blossomed, as did her determination to ensure no one had to struggle like she had. From the time she completed the two-year program and transferred to George Washington University for a bachelor's in education, she's never looked back.

"You can use a learning disability as an excuse, or it can motivate you to apply yourself that much more diligently to each task," said Duques. In following the latter course, she's no different from entrepreneur Sir Richard Branson, writer John Irving and comedian Whoopi Goldberg, all of whom are dyslexic.

Understand that Duques may be a woman of means, but it hasn't distanced her from what matters. "The worst thing is for people to feel on the outside," she said, pausing to greet a waiter by name. "It's so essential to ori-

ent people to be involved and engaged. The more engaged you are, the more you care about the enterprise, whatever it is."

She was discussing her doctoral dissertation, on building a viable board of trustees, but she might as well have been describing her efforts to welcome everyone on the Shoreline to the grand hotel.

Hence, the Grassy Strip Film Festival and Music & Arts Series each Tuesday and Thursday night through August, which were open to the public. Not to mention Duques' insistence that the gift shop and spa be stocked with solely local products and the walls with the works of Shoreline artists like muralist Patrick Ganino. And the popular Sunday brunch, at which entertainment is provided by area musicians.

Still, nowhere is Duques' influence more evident than in her children, in particular, Tiffany, a Columbia University-trained social worker who plans to work with disadvantaged kids at an inner city school. And Scott, whose open-mindedness and financial savvy, she said, "is the reason this hotel is standing."

With that, she glanced again at her watch. And with a friendly wave to the waitstaff readying themselves for the lunch crowd and the sun finally peeking out from the clouds, Duques was off to give that English lesson.

Visit [www.madisonbeachhotel.com](http://www.madisonbeachhotel.com) on the web.

Brunch by the Beach takes place Sunday, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. For brunch reservations, call 203-245 0014.