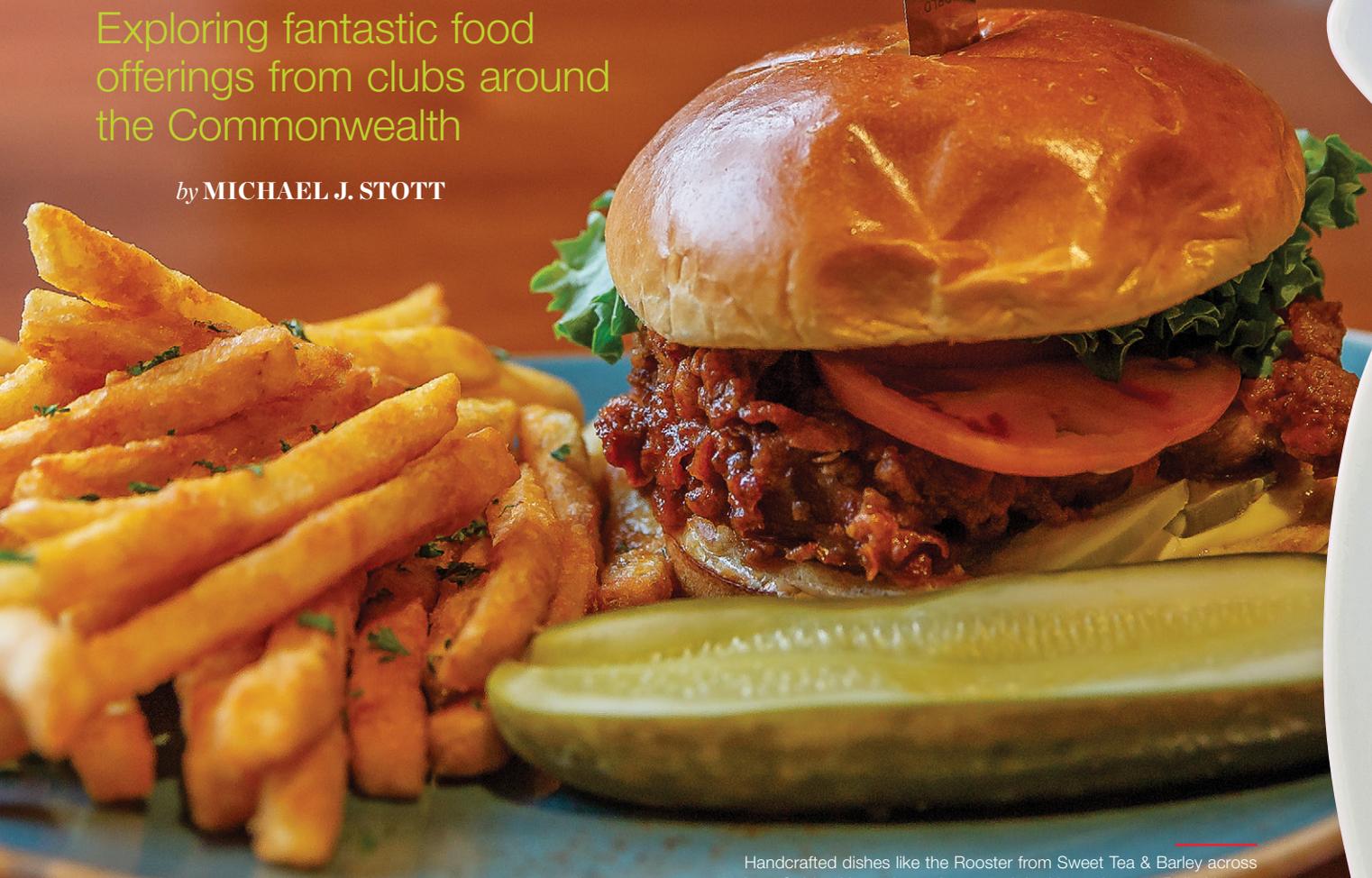


# *Cuisine in the Kingdom*

Exploring fantastic food offerings from clubs around the Commonwealth

by MICHAEL J. STOTT



Handcrafted dishes like the Rooster from Sweet Tea & Barley across from Golden Horseshoe, above, and the king salmon at Belle Haven, right, are the perfect complement to a great day of golf.



## Once an afterthought, food is now integral to virtually any golf course visit.

“If one goes somewhere to play, the entire day is going to be filled with touchpoints that are going to make or break the adventure,” says Marc Guiseppi, PGA general manager at Williamsburg’s Golden Horseshoe. “You could be greeted beautifully and have the round of your life on a magnificent, well-conditioned course, then capped by a meal that’s less than you were expecting. What’s that going to do to your day? Food—it’s part of selling the overall club experience.”

Golf course cuisine is no longer just a dog at the turn. Courses throughout the Commonwealth—resorts, country clubs or daily fee courses—are upping their gastronomic games to offer members and guests plates to please any palate.

Below are just a handful of examples of what innovative Virginia chefs and culinary teams are doing to enhance the golf experience.

### **BELLE HAVEN COUNTRY CLUB, ALEXANDRIA**

Diners in Old Town Alexandria can go many places to get excellent food, but Belle Haven members John Hawkins and John Todd swear by the dishes served up by Chef Duane Keller. Menu creativity and fresh sourcing (thanks to a garden off the driving range) help create a direct farm-to-table link, says Hawkins.

Keller sources food and ingredients far and wide. He goes locally whenever possible and makes extensive use of the Internet, searching for the freshest fish, meat and organic farm vegetables. In May Belle Haven members were served king salmon, only two days removed from waters off British Columbia. A week earlier he served wagyu tomahawk steaks, highly prized beef from Snake River Farm in eastern Idaho.



His piece de resistance, says Todd, is freshly caught, grilled, tasty mid-sized Atlantic Swordfish sourced from Massachusetts. Keller, a personable soul, also complements his food by visiting his diners at their tables, sharing insights on the fare at hand.

Keller also has a large brunch following. “His Easter, Mothers’ Day and Thanksgiving brunches are attended by full capacity BHCC members and are matched by the light, eclectic and tasty nature of the food he makes available to golfers before teeing off,” Todd says.

**PRINCESS ANNE COUNTRY CLUB,  
VIRGINIA BEACH**

When Princess Anne Country Club in Virginia Beach opted for a \$1.2 million renovation of the Chesapeake Room, its main dining room, executive chef Geoff Benson took the opportunity to revamp his menu that services both the main dining room and the Linkhorn Lounge. It’s filled with fresh, locally grown and caught items from the Hampton Roads area. In addition to the main menu, Benson—who previously worked at Belle Meade Country Club in Nashville—added a small plate menu to satisfy both the happy hour crowd and the folks coming off the golf course and tennis courts.




**A WORD TO THE WISE**  
When in doubt, local knowledge concerning golf grub tends to be spot on. Piankatank River Golf Club member Jonathan Vannoy swears by his club’s oyster tacos. “And the franks are better than any big league stadium hotdog,” he says.  
In-house counsel can be even better. One veteran golf writer recalls traipsing in from a disappointing round at Sea Island. A keen-eyed locker room attendant suggested he go to the adjoining Davis Love Grill and try the Kobe Steak salad. “Best lunch I ever had,” the writer says.

*“Chef Travis is very innovative and is always looking to put a signature twist on his dishes.”*

—River Bend Club member Carol McGarry

Princess Anne also offers some interesting on-course options. The club’s “Tasting on the Tees” event has sold out two years in a row and features “themed” wine regions stationed across the golf course with more than 20 wines to sample with well-paired hors d’oeuvres. Most of the club’s golf outings include live grill stations on several holes, which serve local seafood tacos, crab cake sliders and tenderloin bites. Princess Anne anticipates adding a live grill to its “10th Tee” as Benson continues to add fresh ideas and items to liven up golfers’ rounds.



**RIVER BEND CLUB, GREAT FALLS**  
Resourcefulness and creativity in the kitchen are time-honored characteristics of the best cooks. Several years ago, executive chef Trever Travis, faced with

a longer-than-expected remodel, opened up the club’s pool house kitchen to prepare and transport a buffet to the main

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country club in the Commonwealth. Chef Michael Matarazzo and his team at Farmington have left a lasting impression. “Chef Mike goes above and beyond to prepare the most interesting, creative and thoughtful culinary masterpieces,” she avers. He is also a visible presence eager to welcome golfers, members and guests and explain the nuance of his latest offerings.

Fellenstein vividly remembers an association luncheon for which Matarazzo created a full garden lined with bricks on a table to illustrate his farm-to-table philosophy. “It is to this day the most beautiful



Clockwise: Fried green tomatoes from Sweet Tea & Barley; Eastern Shore oysters at Princess Anne; Carrot Cavatelli at Farmington; and lobster, crab and corn wontons at River Bend.



clubhouse. Since the River Bend dining room is not open for dinner he also started “Tuesday Takeouts,” sundry dishes for weary workers facing Northern Virginia’s brutal traffic travails.

Travis classifies the food as New American Cuisine, using fusion, local foods and classical French cooking methods to prepare foods in an appealing presentation. River Bend has featured a 32-ounce tomahawk steak, and one well-known dish is a crusted rockfish. But the club’s signature, Travis says, is its daily specials featuring fresh and locally sourced products.

“Chef Travis is very innovative and is always looking to put a signature twist on his dishes,” says member Carol McGarry. “His lamb chops are done to perfection every time and always consistent. He has turned our Wednesday Pasta Night into a gourmet affair, including soup, wonderful meatballs (a bar bite favorite), gluten-free pasta and much more! Fresh produce is a club staple thanks in part to the vegetable garden he started on the fringe of the golf course itself,” she says.

#### **FARMINGTON COUNTRY CLUB, CHARLOTTESVILLE**

In her travels, Kristin Fellenstein, executive director of the Virginia Chapter of the Club Manager’s Association of America, has visited every golf course and private



# FOOD AT DAILY FEE COURSES

Food and beverages are major drivers of revenue, especially for resorts and country clubs. Not to be outdone, daily fee courses like Independence in Midlothian are pulling out all the stops to compete for appetites beyond those of players completing the latest 18.



## Independence Golf Club, Midlothian

Five years into golf course upgrades and clubhouse expansion, the long-promised food and beverage initiatives set forth by Pros Inc. CEO Giff Breed are gaining serious traction. The club already does a booming catering and special event business, so much so that director of dining and

events Megan Kidd says that Tavern 19 is “a restaurant that has a golf course. It is very important that we make everything the best and food number one.” To do that, Tavern 19 maintains operating hours 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. seven days a week.

In his first year as chef, York, England product Mike Davis has revamped the entire menu. “We are fashion-forward on the culinary side,” Kidd says. Many ingredients are grown on site, including various herbs, tomatoes, assorted fruits and vegetables. Davis has hosted chef dinners under the stars where he explains the nuance of preparation and instituted a Hawaiian luau among other special events. Food pairings with local beer, wine and spirits are a regular occurrence. Woodstone pizza, garnished with homemade marinara and fresh toppings, remains a Tavern 19 staple.



Woodstone pizza with homemade marinara and fresh toppings is a staple at Tavern 19.

display of fresh vegetables that I have ever seen. “Coach Matarazzo and his staff are driven to enhance the dining experience,” she says.

Farmington also employs a food truck for special events that serves items such as fresh shrimp tacos.



The Golden Horseshoe offers gourmet breakfast from 8:30 a.m. to 11 a.m.

## THE GOLDEN HORSESHOE, WILLIAMSBURG

Years ago, John D. Rockefeller set the table for Colonial Williamsburg with his massive endowments. These days it is executive chef Travis Brust and his staff delivering the comestibles to the five-star, five-diamond Williamsburg Inn and Golden Horseshoe guests. To do so, Brust, once a category winner in the World Chef Challenge at the World Food Championships, doesn’t have to travel far. Many of his ingredients, such as colonial-accurate vegetables including lettuces, root vegetables, carrots, parsnips and herbs (horseradish, borage) reside in resort gardens. Also, at his beck and call are hydroponically grown African Blue Basil, pea tendrils and sunflower shoots.

From his kitchen come some time-honored dishes. “The Chicken Niblick has gone through several iterations and always found a spot on our menu,” Brust says. “Currently we showcase a natural grilled chicken breast. It is served with vine-ripened tomatoes, leaf lettuce on a butter grilled brioche bun and finished with our very own “Par-Fect” dressing, a lightly smoked, whole grain mustard and horseradish sauce finished with a touch of honey.

“Every item on our menu is prepared a la minute and to order resulting in dishes ranging from extremely fresh seasonal salads to a piping hot Round Robin Reuben to succulent house-ground prime beef burgers,” Brust says. “We offer a gourmet breakfast from 8:30 a.m. to 11 a.m. and serve a restaurant lunch from 11:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. Our bar is open from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.”

For discerning palates, Brust also provides insightful programming at the resort’s Taste Studio just a short walk from the clubhouse. There, depending on the day, diners can enjoy events that include chef demonstrations, wine tastings and spirit and food pairings. 