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Symmes Tavern changes with the times

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By Eric Schwartzberg

Staff Writer

A Butler County restaurant offering a sports bar, casual dining, entertainment and an outdoor patio nears its 10th anniversary next month with quite a different menu from when it first opened.

When Symmes Tavern on The Green eatery served its first diners on Jan. 23, 2003, it had both a luncheon menu and a dinner menu, according to co-owner Jim Willke.

“Many of the items on the luncheon menu remain on our menu today, but the dinner menu has changed drastically,” said Willke, who built the business at 500 Wessel Drive with two other business partners. “Originally we had filet mignon, lobster at times, Surf and Turf, crab legs, specialty chicken items such as Chicken Marsala, Chicken Piccata, and other similar offerings.”

Through the years, all of those high-priced items and more have been phased out of the menu, in an effort to boost sales and maximize potential for the eatery’s remaining space.

The New York Strip steak remains, but it now comes in two sizes. Ribs come in full slabs, half slabs and a 1/4 slab.

The menu now features a wide variety of homemade soups, salads, appetizers and entrees, including chicken wings, pizza, sandwiches and Symmes Burgers served six different ways. In addition, there’s a special menu that changes monthly depending upon the season.

While the business attracts scores of sports fans to view games on more than 40 televisions, a sports bar is not Symmes Tavern’s sole identity.

“What makes us different is that we are also a dining establishment in Fairfield that is not a chain-operated facility,” Willke said. “We have a full menu, and we also provide entertainment on the weekend. In addition, our patio by the lounge will seat as many as 25 people, and our patio on the south side of our building holds upwards of 100 people.”

Community involvement also helps set the business apart, he said.

“Every year we host the Hero’s Ride breakfast before the ride and generally serve about 300 meals, and then we cater to them when they return,” he said. “We also work with the Community Arts Center to provide meals for patrons who are going to the live shows and make sure that they are served promptly so they can get there on time.

“Through the year, we have had many different events like this, and with our centrally-located facility, we are able to do a lot of good things for a lot of good people.”

Symmestavern’s biggest change came in early 2011 when it closed its banquet room and three dining rooms, eliminating more than 4,500 feet and many of the functions held in those rooms.

“We used to pack the place on Mother’s Day, Easter and Thanksgiving,” Willke said. “We, at one time, had a Sunday brunch and we held parties for wedding receptions, bar mitzvahs and other celebrations, but now we are limited to parties of 50 or less, so that had a major impact on us. It also caused us to rethink our menus, change our kitchen and tighten our belts, all of which has made us more customer friendly with quicker response times if there is a problem.”

To attract and retain customers, Symmestavern has implemented a system that provides them with a reduction in their bills, depending upon the amount of purchases they make for food and beverages.

“We are working to continually improve our service, as well as maintaining our food consistency so customers get the same good food that they may have ordered in the past,” Willke said.

For more information, call 513-829-8440 or visit www.symmestavern.com.

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