

Unmi-steak-able

The usual words fail to describe Augusta's newest steakhouse, a family-owned chain with high-quality service and soups made from scratch

BY SHANNON POWELL

AUGUSTA, GA - Virtually anywhere in the Augusta area, you can find big-name chains and familiar local restaurants offering steaks, pork chops and seafood with various takes on how to serve you a potato. Each of us is guilty of having our "regulars," like the seafood place, the politician's barbecue joint, the lunch meeting place down the street, the place to get a steak for dinner and so on. But familiarity of brand names or habit should not blind us to the less common, more recent additions to our local flavor.



The chocolate mousse pie at The Chop House keeps 'em coming back.

The Chop House may have just recently joined Augusta Mall's shiny new promenade addition on Aug. 11, but General Manager Christopher Alexander brings his many years of experience with The Chop House family with him.

"I started in Knoxville as an hourly cook 14 years ago, worked my way all the way up to a manager, transferred to Chattanooga to manage, and was sent here to open this market. It's very exciting. The company has allowed me to grow as a person and as a manager — this opportunity to open Augusta is fantastic."

Approaching the sand-colored concrete exterior, the glass door is opened by a smiling greeter, welcoming the diner into a warmly lit entryway. Almost instantly, the rich wood, rustic chocolate, sage and burnt orange fabrics, dried flowers and soothing jazz sets the mood for a relaxed dining experience.

It is 4 p.m. on a weekday and several patrons are watching the large flat screens at the expansive dark wood bar.

"Word of mouth has been very good for us already," Alexander says. "We host a happy hour Sunday through Friday from 4-7 with half-priced well drinks, draft beer, house wine — \$6 martinis and \$4 mojitos. Happy hour is popular, and weekends are great."

Part of the Connor Restaurant Group, the family-owned business run by two brothers boasts 16 locations mainly in Tennessee, with properties in Ohio, Kentucky and Alabama. Alexander says, "The family is involved in every aspect of the business, and the president knows the employees by name. They hold to high standards but know there are other things more important than work — like family and building community relationships. Guest-obsessed service is No. 1. We will go to the outer limits to ensure your dining experience is superior and exceeds your expectations."

Alexander quotes one of The Chop House foundations: "All staff members are responsible for all our guests. We work as a team."

The price-driven menu is diverse, with choices from salads and pastas to chicken, ribs and steak burgers. An attractive place for business meetings or casual lunches, most of the lunch menu selections are \$10 or under. "We are a full-service steakhouse with

everything you expect from dinner offered at lunch, something you don't normally see with a steakhouse."

Large groups can be accommodated with advance reservations. The pendant lighting, copper tiles and comfortable chairs create an inviting atmosphere that will make lunch with the boss a little less stressful.

The fork-tender prime rib is slow roasted in specialty ovens for four to six hours and served with natural au jus. The sirloins, filets, ribeyes, pork chops and porterhouse lamb chops are hand selected, premium aged and uniquely seasoned.

Seafood items are delivered fresh five days a week, so the Chop House can offer salmon, shrimp, schrod, a "catch of the day" and homemade blue crab cakes. Most impressive is the fact that they make all their soups, most salad dressings and sauces from scratch in-house.

The general manager admits, "It is very labor intensive, our soups change weekly... There is always something new happening, that's for sure. Even the desserts are made in house."

The Chef's Cobbler also rotates weekly, plus there is chocolate mousse cake with Oreo crust and Grand Marnier whipped topping drizzled in white chocolate. Need more? Then how about colossal homemade onion rings, hand-breaded and fried to order, or giant sweet potatoes topped with their special brown sugar cinnamon butter.

Luckily for those of us who need room for dessert, most entrées are offered in a "down-sized" portion and price. The Chop House has seating inside and outside. The covered patio is comfortable for the cooler weeks ahead and the beautifully appointed brick fireplaces inside will warm right along with the homemade soups.

"We want our guests to leave happy and come back as part of the family," says Alexander. He expects that with quality, impeccable service and great value, The Chop House will "earn its chops" in Augusta.

The Chop House

Augusta Mall

Sun.-Thurs., 11 a.m.-10 p.m.

Fri.-Sat., 11 a.m.-11 p.m.

Happy hour, Sun.-Fri., 4-7 p.m.

706-733-2244

thechophouse.com