

connors

STEAK & SEAFOOD

BY LAURA CUMMINGS



WE BELIEVE IN MAKING DINING A PLEASANT EXPERIENCE FOR OUR GUESTS," HE SAID. "WHETHER YOU COME IN WEARING SHORTS AND A POLO SHIRT WITH SANDALS, OR A BUSINESS SUIT, YOU'LL FEEL COMFORTABLE."

CONNORS STEAK & SEAFOOD REVIVES THE ART OF DOING THINGS RIGHT

NEW RESTAURANT FEATURES DELECTABLE DISHES

Dining in Estero just got tastier.

The new Connors Steak & Seafood in Gulf Coast Town Center offers made-from-scratch American food, seasoned to perfection and served with southern hospitality.

The Estero location is the third for Connors, which opened in Knoxville in 2004. A second location is in Huntsville, Ala., and is where Managing Partner Matt Williams relocated from to open the new restaurant.

"We believe in making dining a pleasant experience for our guests," he said. "Whether you come in wearing shorts and a polo shirt with sandals, or a business suit, you'll feel comfortable."

"You can come in and get a 10-dollar sandwich, or you can get a 35 or 40-dollar steak," said owner Mike Connor, who was in town for opening week to ensure the restaurant bearing his name meets

his tight specifications for quality.

Connor's goal is to create an atmosphere where everyone feels welcome, heartily enjoys their dining experience and leaves satisfied with both the meal and the value. He never tires of guests telling him, "That's the best steak I ever had!"

From the tender filet mignon to the juicy rib eye, each steak served at Connors must have the right amount of age and marbling. Add Connors proprietary seasoning blend, and the flavor is marvelous.

The restaurant practices what Williams calls a "lost art way of doing things," making everything from scratch, including the sauces, dressings and seasonings. A featured flavor of homemade ice cream is made daily. Opening week featured ultra-creamy blueberry.

"The only thing on the menu not made from scratch is the cheesecake, which is flown in from Carnegie Deli in Manhattan," Williams noted. "They do it pretty well."

The atmosphere of Connors is upscale, yet casual. Its stone archway and wooden beams give it a Smoky Mountain cabin feel. Instead of a fireplace in the center, however, the Florida location features water gently flowing down tiles of slate,



set in deep-colored wood.

The bar is located up front and features an attractive display of red and white wines, champagne and beers. The restaurant also offers several coffee drinks and martinis, including the featured Chocolate Martini, combining Stoli Vanilla Vodka, Baileys Irish Cream, Godiva Chocolate Liqueur and shaved chocolate, garnished with a fresh strawberry.

Our evening started with a friendly greeting from our server, April, who had flown in from Alabama to train the Fort Myers wait staff. She fired off an amazing array of house specialties, complete with tantalizing descriptions in her inviting Southern drawl, hardly taking a breath. From "fork tender" prime filet to island mahi-mahi, the possibilities seemed endless, and our mouths were already watering.

The feast began with an appetizer dubbed the Isle of Shellfish. The impressive array of seafood comes on ice and features fresh oysters, jumbo shrimp, lobster tail, lump crab meat and two king crab legs jutting boldly from the center. It's served with zippy tartar sauce and cocktail sauce with a dab of extra horseradish for more bite.

The two of us quickly devoured the Isle of Shellfish, which was no doubt meant for four. Feeling nearly full already, we bravely charged ahead with soup, salad and warm bread dipped in a flavorful combo of extra virgin olive oil and freshly ground pesto.

The Signature Lobster Crab Bisque was amazingly creamy with giant chunks of fresh crab and lobster generously infused. The Baby Spinach and Strawberry Salad featured walnuts, blue cheese crumbles and a tangy sweet vinaigrette.

After sopping up the last of the bisque, it was time to face the glory of the main course. I first feasted with my eyes on the house specialty, the nine-ounce Boursin Filet, a tantalizingly plump filet of beef topped with Boursin cheese and tobacco onions.

Boursin is an herb-infused cream cheese created by Francois Boursin in Normandy, France. When topped with tobacco onions – red onions dipped in seasoned buttermilk and deep fried – this is one tall dish.

The filet mignon was melt-in-your mouth perfection, yet I couldn't help but try the delectable seafood specialty my husband was clearly enjoying across the table. The Parmesan Encrusted Alaskan Halibut is a thick, white filet, baked and drizzled with a buttery lemon piccata sauce and served with creamy rice and broccoli.

Throughout our dining experience, the Connors wait staff employed a teamwork approach, never letting a glass run dry or failing to gauge our satisfaction with a friendly check in.

While we certainly didn't need dessert, there was no way we were leaving without sampling the house specialty, Strawberry Shortcake. The giant slice of sweet cake was served warm and generously topped with Connors' homemade vanilla bean ice cream and a dollop of fresh whipped cream.

Although the Carnegie's New York Cheesecake drizzled with chocolate and caramel sauce was delicious, the strawberry shortcake was heavenly. We certainly left feeling satisfied.

Connors Steak & Seafood is located at 10076 Gulf Center Drive and accepts reservations, walk-ins or call-ahead seating by phoning (239)267-2677. The restaurant also has a private dining area to accommodate parties up to 35. A complete menu is available online at www.connorsrestaurant.com.

RECIPE



SHRIMP & GRITS

INGREDIENTS IN ORDER OF MIXING

- » BUTTER, 4 OZ
 - » GREEN PEPPER, 1/4" JULIENNE 16 STRIPS
 - » YELLOW PEPPER, 1/4" JULIENNE, 16 STRIPS
 - » RED PEPPER, 1/4" JULIENNE 16 STRIPS
 - » RED ONIONS, 3/8" DICED, 8 TBSP.
 - » MINCED GARLIC 2 TSP.
 - » SHRIMP, 41-50 CT. COOKED 1 LB 4 OZ.
 - » ANDOUILLE SAUSAGE, 1/4" SLICED ROUNDS 10 OZ.
 - » TASSO GRAVY OR CAJUN GRAVY 16 OZ
 - » GRITS 2 CUPS
 - » GREEN ONIONS, 1/8" DICED 8 TBSP.
 - » RATTLESNAKE SEASONING 2 TSP
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- » Sauté peppers and onions in butter for 3 minutes.
 - » Add garlic, shrimp and sausage, sauté until shrimp and sausage are hot – approx 3 minutes.
 - » Add Tasso gravy and bring to a boil.
 - » Place grits in center of Chi Fu and pour gravy mix over top.
 - » Garnish with green onions and rattlesnake seasoning.