

Craft beer, farm-fresh focus take root at Redz

By Tammy Paolino

It's easy to cruise by a hotel close to home and pay little attention to whatever restaurant may be housed inside.

While hotel restaurant fare can range from fabulous to mundane, hotels, at least in the suburbs, are not the first place you might seek out local craft beer and spirits events, artisan cocktails or collaborations with local farms.

It helps, of course, if the restaurant is locally owned, and thereby free to explore ways to meet the changing tastes of loyal customers, while pleasing the folks in business suits with their laptops and suitcases.



These hand-designed chalk signs celebrate the host of local and regional beers headed for the new tap system at Redz in Mount Laurel. The signs were drawn by Food and Beverage Manager Deborah O'Connor of Mount Laurel. (Photo: Tammy Paolino/Courier-Post)

Redz, located in the DoubleTree Suites by Hilton in Mount Laurel, is hard at work shaking off preconceptions, while honoring a long tradition of serving the community.

Dean R. Sampson, the hotel and restaurant's general manager, lives in Mount Laurel, and is overseeing a reboot of the restaurant's menu, the launch of a new Bar Bites program and bar improvements that include the installation of a 12-tap beer system meant to showcase a rotating bounty of local beer.

Working with him is Deborah O'Connor, also of Mount Laurel, who collaborates with area brewers on new events, including Beer of the Week and tap takeovers. O'Connor also works together with Chef Roeloff DeGroot of Stratford, a former airline pilot, to evolve the seasonal menus with a focus on locally procured foods.

Before Redz was Redz, it was GGs, a popular restaurant run by the late developer and philanthropist Roger Davis. The rebranding came about three years ago, says Sampson, and the business is now owned by son Mitchell Davis of Cherry Hill. Known for its fresh seafood, Redz also offers other types of American-inspired fare, such as cheeseburgers and steaks. The restaurant gets its name "in honor of all the red-haired women who have had such an influence in (Mitchell Davis') life."



“The family has been here forever and ever,” Sampson says. “The family built the hotel, and the son is now running the business. The family has played a big part in this community for many, many years. They do a lot of good in this community, quietly, without a lot of fanfare.

“Even though Redz is fairly new, there is a very familiar feel to it. We try to give our customers what they want,” he continues. “This has always been a scratch-cook kitchen, and a restaurant known for its consistency and quality of service.

“If it was not for this local community, we would not be here. We still have a few fiercely loyal customers from the GG’s days.”



A crab cake is made to order at Redz in Mount Laurel. The restaurant is known for its seafood, although there is plenty for other guests. (Photo: Matt Seaver)

So beloved items are there to stay, but there is a lot that’s new at Redz.



Redz staff works closely with area farmers and also Jersey Fresh to keep the menu fresh and seasonal, including desserts and cocktails. (Photo: Tammy Paolino/Courier-Post)

“We play with the menu on an ongoing basis to see what our clients are really going to enjoy,” says Sampson. “We see how well they do with people, almost like they are part of a tasting with us, but we always hang onto a couple of the old favorites that people really like. It’s always be about the salads, always about fresh seafood, and the fish of the day.”

There is also a quesadilla of the day, an omelet of the day.

“And we have the most fabulous burger ... It’s just great with the fresh mozzarella and the pickled onions and barbecue and a brioche bun,” says O’Connor.

A new Bar Bites program offers guests a range of seasonal munchies (\$7-12) to enjoy with all the craft beer. Options meant for sharing include fresh guacamole and chips, with an option to add crabmeat; Buttermilk and Herb Marinated Calamari; house made Bavarian pretzel sticks; crab nachos, sausage sliders, as well as Chicken Drumettes, served with melted Boursin, goat and Mascarpone cheese, and carrot and celery sticks.

Sampson enjoys his journeys to area farms, including the Browning-Hess Farm in Moorestown and the Burlington County Farmers Market.

New signature cocktails include Dark and Stormy Jersey Night (\$10), which blends dark rum, ginger beer and lime; Mount Laurel Mule (\$10), a mix of vodka, ginger beer and lime, served with a salt water taffy treat; Ruby Redz Paloma (\$12), which includes tequila, ruby red grapefruit juice, lime and club soda, and Redzberry Beret (\$11), with vodka, raspberry puree, lime and ginger beer. And then there’s Bubbles & Berries’ (\$11), which features sparkling wine and Chambord with freshly muddled raspberries.



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Special dinners pairing food with craft beers and spirits from local makers also is in the works.

While Redz has the sleek and contemporary look you might expect from a Hilton property, with plenty of beige and red accents, the shift towards local and seasonal is obvious from original artwork and signage created by O'Connor, who has learned to replicate in chalk perfectly the logos of a dozen area breweries from Cape May on up the coast.

So far, Redz plans to tap beers from Kane, Jersey Girl, Victory, Dogfish Head, River Horse, Cape May, Flying Fish and Forgotten Boardwalk, which is expected to be featured in a tap takeover in November.



Dean R. Sampson of Mount Laurel, general manager of the DoubleTree Suites by Hilton, and Redz, enjoys a craft beer with Food and Beverage Manager Deborah O'Connor of Mount Laurel. Redz is installing a new tap system to accommodate a rotation of local and regional craft beers. (Photo: Tammy Paolino/Courier-Post)



Seasonal bar bites, meet craft beer, at Redz. (Photo: Tammy Paolino/Courier-Post)

They hope, especially, to have some fun with Flying Fish's Exit 4 beer brand, given they are right off Exit 4 of the NJ Turnpike.

"Our hotel guests come from all over the country and they want to try local brews," says O'Connor.

Adds Sampson, "Everything we do here ties back with the local community and local businesses. I'd much rather give my money to someone who is supporting the community than some corporation."

IF YOU GO

Redz American-Inspired Fare is located within DoubleTree Suites, 515 Fellowship Road, Mount Laurel. Call (856) 22-0335 or visit <http://redzrestaurant.com/>



Redz is rebooting its menu, launching a new Bar Bites menu and collaborating with local breweries, farmers and distilleries. (Photo: Tammy Paolino/Courier-Post)



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