

Clubs Expand Dining with Outdoor Options

By Pamela Brill | March 31, 2020



Shadow Wood Country Club

Outdoors has become the preferred place to be, as clubs and resorts welcome the change in seasons with exciting and inviting exterior space.

The cure for cabin fever is a healthy dose of outdoor activity. As the calendar turns to spring and clubs open their doors to members and guests looking to dine and socialize outside, revitalizing patios and adjoining eateries becomes a priority.



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To meet the demands of a growing customer base and accommodate a surge in *a la carte* dining and special events, these facilities illustrate how redesigning their outdoor space has become vital to sustaining member satisfaction.

Creating a Fountain of Youth

At Shadow Wood Country Club in Estero, Fla., a dedicated space for member dining fueled the decision to convert an existing outdoor dining spot into a full-fledged food-and- beverage operation.

"We decided to utilize our new space for member *a la carte* dining only," says Clubhouse Manager Jeff Brown. "We have over 1,100 memberships, and this gave us an opportunity to be able to accommodate a much higher percentage." The newly named Golfside Grill (see photo above) opened last November, with no disruption to service, and turned a former 36-seat piazza into a covered dining area that now seats 260.



"We decided to utilize our new outdoor space for member a la carte dining only. We have over 1,100 memberships, and this gave us an opportunity to be able to accommodate a much higher percentage." —Jeff Brown, Clubhouse Manager, Shadow Wood Country Club in Estero, Fla.

Amassing 9,000 square feet, the spacious grill is adjacent and accessible to the clubhouse lobby, lounge and dining rooms, the latter of which is connected via a set of nano doors along the south wall. Brown credits this installation for "opening the dining room to the outside and providing a panoramic view of our beautiful sunsets and outdoor space."

To better serve the grill, the club erected a self-contained kitchen, which features a pizza oven, open-concept sushi bar and built-in hot/cold buffet lines in the member dining area. "The location of the kitchen, sushi and permanent buffet area has increased our efficiencies in providing food to our members and guests with excellent ticket times," Brown notes. "It has increased our speed of service exponentially."

Stellar service is essential for Shadow Wood's busy outdoor dining facility, which boasts a variety of seating options and configurations. Members can relax at high-top tables, lounge seating, banquettes or at standard tables, along with 21 seats at the center bar or five seats at the sushi bar.

Outfitted in a soft color palette of white and gray with darker accents, the overall design creates a comfortable, casual vibe for dinner and drinks. To protect members from the Florida sun's penetrating rays, the entire dining venue is completely covered and also includes built-in electric shades to reduce glare.

With such a thoughtfully designed layout, members are responding in kind to the new space. According to Director of Membership and Marketing Danita Osborn, usage has increased by approximately 70 percent from previous years.

"In fact, we served 6,000 more meals in December 2019 than we served in December 2018," she says. "Our focus has been to deliver a quality food offering to members at a reasonable price, in an efficient manner with a friendly smile."

Osborn praises the renovation for instilling a tremendous energy in the dining area and throughout the club. "Our membership is more engaged than any prior time in the club," she says. "We have been told by some members [that] the beautiful space and energy makes them feel younger."



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Outdoor Oasis

Offering a staycation for its members was the goal of a recent patio renovation at the Red Tail Golf Club. In June 2018, the Avon, Ohio-based facility expanded its patio café from a 75-person seating capacity to a 175-person eatery.



"We wanted the expansion to our Patio Café to make our members and guests feel like they were at a resort, without a care in the world." — Brandi Cole, Food and Beverage Director, Red Tail Golf Club in Avon, Ohio

The goal was to create a destination that met members' needs and exceeded their expectations. "We wanted the expansion to our Patio Café to make our members and guests feel like they were at a resort, without a care in the world," says Food and Beverage Director Brandi Cole.

Situated alongside the 18th-hole fairway and the tee box for the 10th hole, Red Tail's café provides golfers with a neighboring post-game respite. Newly installed stamped concrete seating assumes 2,000 square feet, while an array of outdoor couches and chairs are positioned around three custom-stonework firepits. Adjacent bocce ball courts include a covered seating area to take in a game or two.

Maximizing the outdoor dining experience is the addition of a wood-fired pizza kitchen, complete with a custom-made pizza oven, to which patrons have a front-row seat. "Our members can interact with our chefs while they prepare gourmet pizza and other fun food creations," says Cole.

The pizza kitchen enhances the open-air kitchen design for optimal efficiency, enabling dishes to move from oven to table, and offering a seamless path for front- and back-of-house staff.

The Patio Café's design is enhanced by a variety of décor elements, including granite countertops, professional landscaping, in-ground accent lighting at the café, pole lights on the bocce courts and decorative string lighting overhead. To protect the café from the elements, the pizza kitchen features a custom-made awning, enabling staff to handle foodservice operations undisturbed.

"A large portion of the seating area is covered by a pergola with aromatic wisteria [that] allows for protection from the heat of the day, as well as from brief showers," notes Cole.

Speaking of weather, Red Tail's patio cafe project was slightly impacted by Mother Nature during the course of the renovation, but ultimately did not upset the overall schedule. "The northern Ohio spring was a bit of a challenge and did cause a small delay, but the contractors were superior," recalls Cole. "As soon as the weather allowed, the project was completed with plenty of time for our members to enjoy the summer season in style."

And enjoy it, they did. Red Tail's summertime business increased by 20 percent due to the patio project's success. "We not only have more patrons, members and non-members alike, enjoying the patio, but many of our catered events and weddings have chosen to have their function at the new and improved space," Cole says, noting the addition of a 12-foot x 16-foot cedar pavilion.

The club is enthused by members' sentiments that have become universal. "It's been described as 'the next best thing to a private resort or a beautiful vacation getaway,'" says Cole of recent feedback.



Double the Patio Pleasure

At Hop Meadow Country Club in Simsbury, Conn., expanding the outdoor space from 4,000 to 8,000 square feet was a game-changing experience last May. By adding a 1,000-sq. ft. outdoor bar, 1,000-sq. ft. outdoor dining pavilion, extra seating and revamped deck space, this renovation has been described as a “transformative project” by John Bermel, Treasurer, Board member and Chair of Hop Meadows’ patio bar committee.

Located just off the back and side of the clubhouse, the patio is a hot spot that draws usage from all four corners of the property: the pool, the third hole, six tennis courts and banquet facilities. While the layout utilizes the existing interior banquet for access to the kitchen, the design has also been supplemented with outside serving areas and POS stations that support the dining and bar areas.

Seating is available for up to 160 patrons in the bar and dining areas—flexible zones that Bermel says “can easily accommodate a reception for 250 people and provide much improved access to the club’s pool and tennis areas.”

Surrounding the entire deck is a wire railing system with a wood top rail, while overhead a custom awning lined with pendant lighting provides coverage for both the bar and dining pavilions. Comfort zones outfitted with sofas and chairs are featured in the dining and fire pit areas, where pavers lead the way from the patio bar to the pool area.

These same pavers also constitute a large landing area at the bottom of a grand staircase which, Bermel says, “is considered the literal and figurative centerpiece of the outdoor facility.” Wall sconces, spot lighting above the bar and colored LED around the top of the bar itself showcase this space as dusk brings nightfall.



“We are comfortable in three seasons—and we stayed open into early November in our first year [since the renovation].” —John Bermel, Treasurer, Hop Meadow Country Club in Simsbury, Conn.



Hop Meadow CC has seen a 50 percent increase in F&B spending since its patio renovation, and special-event bookings have also been on the rise.

Overhead heaters in both the bar and dining pavilions, along with electric screens that provide complete protection from wind and sun, extend the patio’s usefulness. “We are comfortable in three seasons—and we stayed open into early November in our first year [since the renovation],” Bermel notes.

By creating both a practical and purposeful outdoor space, Hop Meadow has seen a boost in overall membership following the patio renovation. Bermel reports a 50 percent increase in food-and-beverage spending over the previous year, and says special-event bookings are also on the rise.

“In the summer, Sundays have become a consistently strong revenue day for the club, as members enjoy being at the pool and then having a meal with their family on the patio,” he adds.

Patio Dining at Its Peak

When it comes to fulfilling outdoor dining needs, Mountain Ridge Country Club has got it covered—literally. After completing a multi-tiered renovation that included a fully renovated clubhouse and updated golf course [“Preserving the Future,” *C+RB*, October 2019], the West Caldwell, N.J.-based facility underwent an outdoor dining renovation that bumped up its footprint from 7,099 to 10,400 square feet. The larger space now features covered areas for the club’s two *al fresco* eateries.



All of Mountain Ridge CC’s outdoor space was expanded to maximize views of the club’s Donald Ross golf course and the surrounding landscape.

The primary reason for the increase in square footage was to accommodate a brand-new, 4,200-sq. ft. tent that can hold 275 guests. “Our banquet room is very small, due to the architecture of the clubhouse, so a majority of our ‘life’ events (weddings, bar/bat mitzvahs) take place in the beautifully appointed tent,” says General Manager/COO James Messina. The tent’s firm blue stone floor “allows party planners and décor companies to have a solid footprint to put forth a great party,” he adds.

As for the two outdoor dining spots, located at the back of the clubhouse and overlooking the golf course, The Pub features an indoor/outdoor bar, four televisions and a seating capacity of 120. Messina describes this casual dining spot as “the workhorse of the lunch/post-golf cocktail/snack operation.” While remaining virtually untouched and utilizing the existing footprint, the design has been enhanced by the installation of moveable doors that provide the experience of being outdoors even while inside.

A covered patio area, just off The Pub, has a canvas top and drop-down shade screens for protection from sunset glare. Fans cool the air on sultry summer days, and portable heaters extend the usefulness of this space well into crisp fall evenings.

Over at The Mixed Grill dining patio, an enlarged seating area is now covered and seats 150 people. “In an equity club, it is vital that all members be seated in a like area with similar panoramic views [of the club’s 1930 Donald Ross-designed 18-hole course],” says Messina.

SUMMING IT UP

- > Increasing the footprint of outdoor facilities allows clubs to better serve both *a la carte* and event dining.
- > Easy access to the clubhouse, kitchen and recreational facilities creates better workplace flow.
- > Special attention to purposeful lighting and generous seating mimics the comforts of indoor dining.

Like its Pub counterpart, the Grill benefits from a set of moveable doors, with the added bonus of boosting the interior square footage and ceiling height. The extra space made room for a 24-person square bar just off the door system, “allowing those members enjoying a casual drink [to] take in the dramatic Mountain Ridge views and get that fresh air from the exterior,” Messina notes. A 1,000-sq.-ft. covered area transitions directly into the non-covered dining area and includes fans, drop-down shade screens and recessed heaters.

As a result of the redesigned outdoor facility, Mountain Ridge has seen substantial increases in member dining. According to Messina, Sunday family BBQs averaged 250 covers in 2019,

surpassing the previous year’s best of 190. In addition, Friday Tavern Night improved from 120 covers to 150.

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