



SOUTHERN COMFORT

At Greystone G&CC, a comfortably innovative menu and exciting events tailored to smaller groups have boosted F&B revenue and attracted new members.

by Joanna DeChellis, Editor

GREYSTONE

AT A GLANCE

Club Name: Greystone Golf & Country Club

Location: Birmingham, Ala.

Members: 775

Average Annual F&B

Revenue: \$1.75 million

A la carte/Banquet Mix: 60/40

Food Cost: 38-42%

Quarterly Food & Beverage

Minimum: \$200

Average No. Annual Golf

Outings: 30+

Annual Golf Rounds: 37,000 between 36 holes

Foodservice Sites: 8

Foodservice Employees: 45

Kitchen sizes:

- Founders main kitchen (44' x 30')
- 19th hole kitchen (16' x 20')
- Legacy kitchen (51' x 100')

Clubhouse sizes:

- Founders, 37,000 sq. ft.
- Legacy, 12,500 sq. ft.

Executive Chef Daniel Mitchell may not be a native of Birmingham, Ala.—but his “comfortably innovative” cuisine, which marries low-country Creole with classic French technique, has played a big role in the evolution of Birmingham’s Greystone Golf & Country Club.

Mitchell has been with Greystone since 1999, starting as a sous chef and working his way up to Executive Chef in September 2010. As he rose through the ranks, Greystone, which was originally built in 1991 as a golf-centric amenity to support home sales, transformed into a family-oriented property with an extensive package of supporting attractions.

“It was a young club when I first came here, and the F&B department was in its infancy,” says Mitchell. “Food and beverage was not the primary draw; golf was the focus. But as the club has grown, so has the demand for dining.”

Golf is still big at Greystone—but F&B now shares the limelight, too.

“Not everyone plays golf. Not everyone plays tennis. Not everyone works out or plays cards,” says Calvin Bolling, General Manager. “But everyone eats.”

“Our F&B operation creates positive energy within the membership,” Bolling adds. “[Members] want to dine here because of the quality and value we offer and the chance to dine with friends.”

ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL

With an ever-growing list of dining options and programs, there’s something for almost everyone who wants to eat at Greystone. But it hasn’t always been that way.

A few years ago, as the club sought to enhance the value of its F&B operation, drive revenue and improve member satisfaction, Greystone discovered that a one-size-fits-all approach doesn’t work.

To grow, the club had to shrink.

“Although the quality of food has always been high here, we’ve increased usage by adding more personalized events, menus and experiences geared toward smaller membership groups,” says Mitchell.

Dinner at The Falls is a perfect example.

During lunch service Friday through Tuesday, The Falls offers a bistro-like experience. But on Friday and Saturday nights, it transforms into the club’s only upscale restaurant.

The Falls offers two menus to choose from—the traditional dinner menu as



Dinner at The Falls is a popular offering for members looking for upscale dining. On a typical Friday, the club will flip the room once. On Saturdays, they'll have one full seating.

SOUTHERN COMFORT

well as the four-course "Vine & Dine" pairing menu.

"The Falls [see photo, left] has an intimate atmosphere that lends itself well to the style of service we provide on the weekends," says Mitchell.

Both menus at The Falls change weekly, to feature the freshest and most seasonally appropriate ingredients. "We try to use familiar ingredients prepared or deconstructed in interesting ways," says Mitchell. "It's the perfect place to be a little more progressive."

Plus, the "Vine & Dine" menu has helped Greystone reach its wine lovers more frequently than it can with quarterly wine dinners and semi-annual wine festivals.

AFTER HOURS

Another example of growing smaller is the club's "Legacy Late Night."

"We wanted to target younger members who enjoy dining a bit later," says Mitchell. "This group enjoys signature cocktails, craft beers and small plates."

After dinner service on Fridays, The Falls transforms into a swanky lounge with dim lights, an outdoor fire pit, drink specials and a tapas menu featuring dishes such as sweetbread beignets, fried green tomatoes, Andouille-crusting scallops, shucked oysters or soft-shell crabs.

"We push the culinary envelope with this crowd, too," says Mitchell. "They're more adventurous eaters."

Another example of niche marketing is Greystone's takeout program, available on Monday and Tuesday nights. Introduced two years ago as a way to generate more revenue, it has maintained strong and steady support ever since. (In fact, in 2013, takeout will generate close to \$43,000 in sales.)

"Our members have busy lives," says Mitchell. "Takeout gives them the opportunity to use their club, even when they don't have time to dine here."

The takeout menu consists of two dinner-package options. One is generally a comfort-style meal, such as lasagna,

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chicken casserole or fried chicken. The other option is usually a single-serving protein, such as grilled fresh fish, baked chicken breast or pork tenderloin, paired with fresh side items. Both options come with rolls, salad and dessert, are priced between \$10 and \$15 per person, and are available in quantities of two or four.

Members place their orders on the club's website and orders are picked up from the Legacy clubhouse, where the meals are prepared and packaged.

"One of the keys to our continued F&B success has been in finding ways to meet our members where they are," says Bolling.

Successful programs like Takeout, Dinner at The Falls, Vine & Dine and Legacy Late Night demonstrate how targeting smaller groups has helped the club to grow its overall operation. (In fact, as a result of its niche approach, Greystone has added over 270 new members, and F&B revenues are up by more than \$300,000 over the past few years.)

STATUS UPDATES

For Greystone's marketing team, "meeting members where they are" means taking a modern approach to F&B promotion, too.

"One of the most powerful tools we have to engage with members is social media," says Ashley Fuentes, Membership Marketing Director, who has encouraged department heads like Mitchell to connect with members through Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, YouTube and Clubster.

"Not everyone reads the newsletter," she says. "Not everyone wants to receive e-mails or text messages. But by using social media, we can appear, for example, in our members' Facebook feeds, with a targeted message inviting them to dinner at the club."

When that approach works best, the member sees the post and then "likes" it so friends will see it, too. "Some members respond better to images and others respond to words, so we post both in a number of outlets," says Fuentes.



A new patio added at the back of the Founders clubhouse (top) has helped Greystone attract 11 more weddings this year than last.



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General Manager Calvin Bolling (right) and Chef Daniel Mitchell share the same mindset: "If we don't try, we won't succeed."



FACILITY FACELIFT

In addition to smart marketing tactics, Greystone also puts strong emphasis on its physical dining spaces, to ensure they are both up-to-date and functional.

Most recently, the club added some much-needed outdoor dining space at the rear of the Founders clubhouse, overlooking signature hole #18 (see photos, pg. 19). "We broke ground on what had been a landscaped lawn on January 1, 2012," says Bolling—and by mid-March, the \$275,000 project was complete.

The patio addition helped the club attract 11 more weddings in 2013 than in the previous year. And it has given Greystone a much larger outdoor space for member events.

"On the first Friday of every month, we host a club event on the patio with drink specials, small plates and live music," says Mitchell.

In addition to the patio, Greystone also recently underwent a tasteful modernization to enhance the Founders Clubhouse foyer, restrooms, main dining room and Trophy Room. A men's



Greystone will post photos like the one above to its social media pages to help connect with members and encourage them to come to the club.

lounge area was also added inside the men's locker room, complete with high-definition, flat-screen televisions, leather chairs, bar space and access to the Trophy Room Patio.

The project cost \$145,000 and took three months to complete.

"Updating our facilities is incredibly important to our overall identity," says Bolling. "By improving these spaces, our members have more options to dine and entertain that better align with their tastes. The upgrades have also allowed us to segregate golfing members from private parties, so each group can enjoy their club independent of one another."

In the not-too-distant future, Greystone plans to renovate and expand its kitchens as well as add dining space, as the club seeks to attract a major golf tournament.

"The next path for us will be to redesign the kitchens and expand their footprints, and add a larger casual dining space that can be open for lunch and dinner six days a week," says Bolling. "We'd also like to create a chef's garden."

IF AT FIRST YOU DON'T SUCCEED...

Greystone's operating motto is simple: If you don't try, you won't succeed.

"The only way we'll continue to grow is to try new things," says Bolling. "Sometimes progress looks like failure, but it's not failure. If we try something and it fails, we explore why it failed and try again. That's the only way we learn—and the only way we grow."

Mitchell subscribes to this same philosophy.

"Having the support and the autonomy to try new things inspires my staff to make everything we do a success," he says. "If someone has an idea for an event or a dish, we'll give it a try. We are not afraid to experiment."

In large part, the staff and their ideas are what make F&B a success at Greystone. And according to Mitchell, that attitude is deeply ingrained in the club's culture.

"The Board, the GM, all the department heads and even the members share the same mindset," he says. "We work for each other, and together we will elevate Greystone to the next level." ■

DINING AT THE STONE

Greystone Golf & Country Club, Birmingham, Ala., attributes much of its F&B success to the support of its membership and the ambition of its 19-member culinary team, led by Executive Chef Daniel Mitchell and Sous Chefs Nathan McCaleb and Kenny Thomas.

Here is a breakdown of all that the club's dining program has to offer:

Inside the Founders Clubhouse

All dining areas inside the Founders clubhouse are available Inside the Founders Clubhouse change to for lunch, after-rounds and casual dinner service Wednesday through Sunday, with breakfast available on the weekends. Special weekly dining events at Founders include a weekly family night and a champagne Sunday brunch.

- Main Dining Room (110 seated/225 standing)
The Trophy Room and Terrace (26 seated)
- Men's Lounge
- 19th Hole (30 seated)
- The Patio (350 for a wedding, more than 200 for a sit-down dinner and over 400 for a cocktail party.)

Inside the Legacy Clubhouse

All dining areas inside the Legacy clubhouse are available for lunch, after-rounds and dinner service Friday through Tuesday, with breakfast available on the weekends. Special weekly dining events at Legacy include Takeout on Monday and Tuesday, Dinner at the Falls on Friday and Saturday nights, Legacy Late Night on Fridays, and Sunday's "meat 'n' three" specials.

- The Falls (36 seated)
- Legacy Lounge (9 seated)
- Men's Grill (26 seated)