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HAUTE, BUT NOT HAUGHTY

THERE'S NOTHING CASUAL ABOUT HOW MIXED GRILLS ARE REDEFINING THEMSELVES WITH INVENTIVE, UPSCALE CUISINE.

by Joanna DeChellis, Editor

Belmont CC members enjoy upscale, innovative cuisine in a casual dining atmosphere.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MIXED GRILLS AND CASUAL DINING HAS CHANGED. For the most part, these venues have eliminated all the formalities—dress codes, white tablecloths, bone china, etc.

Now, their focus is on the food.

"Members aren't looking for all the pomp and circumstance when they come to the mixed grill," says Executive Chef Bryan Strevig, Belmont Country Club, Ashburn, Va. "They want a great meal in a casual atmosphere."

Club chefs like Strevig are responding by finding creative ways to elevate casual fare, giving it an upscale twist that is modern yet approachable.

Belmont's flatbread, panini and taco menus are solid examples of this approach.

"On Wednesdays, we try to feature trendy specials that are fun and still user-friendly," says Strevig, who calls his culinary style "eclectic American."

The panini menu, for example, features five different sandwiches, each pressed to order. Varieties include a turkey and arugula with goat cheese and a roasted pepper tartar; bastille chicken served with crispy bacon, brie, apples, spinach and Dijon; a French dip; a German bratwurst, and a tomato mozzarella served with pesto.

Other casual-dining favorites at Belmont revolve

around updated versions of classics, such as cornmeal-dusted oysters paired with pickled apples and a malt vinegar aioli, or prosciutto and provolone tortellini.

At The Manor Golf & Country Club, Alpharetta, Ga., Executive Chef Michael Parks focuses his mixed grill menu on healthful offerings—like his seasonal quinoa salad made (in the fall/winter) with pumpkin seeds, diced apples, dried cranberries and fresh fennel.

"Members e-mail me raving about the quinoa salad," says Parks. "It's a 'superfood' ingredient that catches their attention. Plus, it tastes really good."

The salad is served with another superfood: kale chips drizzled with olive oil and sea salt.

On the less healthful, but still delicious, side of his operation, Parks' burger wrap and bang-bang shrimp tacos are also huge hits with casual customers.

The burger, which features shaved lettuce, julienned Roma tomatoes, onions, sliced pickles and Parks' secret sauce, is layered in a wrap and pressed in a panini press until crispy.

"The shrimp has a cornmeal breading on it," says Parks. "I grill it and serve them with a sweet chili sauce and slaw. It's simple, but the flavors are big." ■