

A.C. Country Club's Class

Chef keeps quality as years go on

By **SCOTT CRONICK**
At The Shore, 609-272-7017

A lot has changed in the last 20 years at Atlantic City Country Club, including its ownership, course design and its transformation from private to public course. But one thing hasn't changed: Executive Chef Brian Clotworthy.

Over the last two decades, the country club's chef since 1985 has been as synonymous with the 111-year-old institution as its unparalleled view of the Atlantic City skyline and the fact that the golf term "birdie" was coined there.

"Somehow, I stand the test of time," says Clotworthy with a laugh. "I think it's because I know the place, I'm good with people and I've always kept the standards very high here regarding the quality of food."

It's true that plenty of people like Clotworthy, but it's his food that keeps them coming back. Whether it's in the club's Tap



Staff photos by Anthony Szedek

Executive Chef Brian Clotworthy is proud of Atlantic City Country Club's menu. 'I keep it simple and kill them with quality,' he says.

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More About Atlantic City Country Club ...

Clotworthy's Famous Crab Cakes'

"Like the rest of my cooking, they are very simple," says Executive Chef Brian Clotworthy. "They are 100 percent jumbo lump crab meat with no fillers, a mayonnaise base, Old Bay seasoning and some other stuff I can't tell you or they wouldn't be a secret anymore. The biggest secret is cooking them to order; we pan fry them. Don't let them lay around. Don't make them the day ahead. Do them to order. The fresh ingredients really stand out if you do that. They are probably still our No. 1 seller."

Sunday Brunch

Every Sunday, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., the best non-casino brunch in southern New Jersey is served in the Atlantic City Country Club's stunning banquet hall that overlooks the course. Named the No. 1 brunch in South Jersey by Philadelphia Magazine, the brunch features omelet and waffle stations, a prime-rib carving station, entrees like chicken Francaise with lobster sauce, a pasta that changes every week, Eggs Benedict, Bananas Foster french toast, and a dessert display that has everything from crême brulee to chocolate mousse to a chocolate fountain that you can dip fruit and Rice Krispies treats into. There's even a kids station with chicken fingers, macaroni and cheese and French fries, and live music.

Celebrities

Golf or dine at Atlantic City Country Club, and you might run into some major celebrities, particularly entertainers who may be performing at one of the Harrah's Entertainment properties. "(Actors) Joe Pesci and Robert De Niro came here together," Clotworthy says. "The celebrities love playing here. I love taking care of them. The band Chicago came and played here, lots of sports stars and even (actor) Samuel L. Jackson. It's fun to cook for guys like that, and you learn what they're all about. For example, a guy like (former Philadelphia 76ers star) Julius Erving came and there's this big elaborate buffet. And all he wanted was pancakes. So we made them for him, and he was happy."



One of the dishes customers should try at Atlantic City Country Club is the milk-fed, long-bone, center-cut veal chop, which costs \$36. "No one else uses what we use here," says Executive Chef Brian Clotworthy, who has seen many changes at the venue.

Tap Room Bar & Grill at Atlantic City Country Club

WHERE: 1 Leo Fraser Drive (intersects at Shore Road), Northfield

WHEN: Breakfast served 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. daily. Lunch served 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Dinner served at 5 p.m. Thursdays to Saturdays. Sunday brunch served 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

HOW MUCH: Breakfast ranges \$6 to \$16. Lunch: soup and salads range \$10 to \$17.25; appetizers \$10; wraps \$12; sandwiches and entrees \$11 to \$17.50. Dinner: appetizers range from \$9 to \$17; salads \$7.50 to \$17; pasta \$14 to \$24; seafood \$18 to \$43; meats, veal and chicken \$24 to \$36. Sunday brunch \$24.95 adults, \$14.95 children 12 and under; under 4 eat free.

SERVICES: Disabled access via ramp through lobby. Liquor license. Major credit cards accepted. Kids menu for lunch and dinner. No smoking. Breakfast, lunch, dinner, Sunday brunch.

MORE INFO: Call 609-236-4400 or go to www.harrah's.com/golf/atlantic-city-country-club

BETWEEN YOU AND ME: Do yourself a favor and get to Atlantic City Country Club before the weather gets cold and sit outside on the terrace that overlooks the golf course. It's a dinner or lunch setting that is pretty spectacular.



Staff photo by Anthony Smedley

The Tap Room at Atlantic City Country Club in Northfield is always a nice place to grab a meal.

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Room Bar & Grill, its banquet hall or on the outside terrace. Clotworthy's philosophy is "keep things simple."

"I am all about showing off the

quality that we use here," says Clotworthy, who is now able to show off his culinary skills to the masses since the restaurant and golf course are open to the public. "When the Fraser family was

here and it was members only, we did big business; we had 2,000 members. Then when Bally's bought it, we didn't do much because it was strictly high rollers. Now that Harrah's has it, they want to bring it back to what it was. They got the liquor license and really put a lot of money into the place to fix it up — new walls, new ceilings, new furniture, silverware.

"So my job is to let the ingredients speak for themselves. I keep it simple and kill them with quality. The best part is that the clientele we get knows the difference. They appreciate it. (General Manager) Mike Bowman doesn't tie my hands. He agrees that we have to serve the best of the best. You may find food like this in casino gourmet restaurants, but no one else uses what we use here. So I try not to get all fancy. When you do that, you bury yourself and it ends up

not being that great."

Clotworthy speaks the truth. All of the meats, including the 10-ounce New York strip (\$17.50) for lunch and the 14-ounce version at night (\$35) are certified prime. The lobster tail (\$43 broiled or fraisee) is Western Australian cold-water lobster.

The shrimp cocktail (\$17) is magnificently huge. Clotworthy's famous crab cakes (\$17.25 for lunch, \$29 for dinner) are filled with jumbo lump crabmeat and the new menu boasts a milk-fed, long-bone, center-cut veal chop (\$36).

"I am very fussy about the seafood, and my vendors know it," Clotworthy says. "They don't try to sneak anything past me. And the buying power of the casinos gets us the price so that we can do this. Local guys can't afford to put on the menu what we have. All of it is the best of the

best."

If meats and seafood aren't your thing, the club also offers pasta dishes, including lobster ravioli (\$24) with a pink lobster sherry sauce and chicken alfredo (\$19); salads like the signature Mandarin salad (\$10) with mixed greens, Maytag blue cheese, pine nuts, Mandarin oranges and a Mandarin orange vinaigrette; and dim sum (\$10).

"If you look at the menus, they are actually very similar to what they were years ago," says Bowman, who also serves as the assistant general manager of all resort operations of Harrah's Resort. "There is nothing better than having a chef so focused on fresh ingredients and simplicity."

Harrah's decision to go public and Clotworthy's food is a combination that is working.

"The word is starting to get out, but we are still at the tip of the iceberg trying to let the public know that they are welcome again," says Banquet and Golf Sales Manager Pete McCollum. "It was private for so long, it's a real challenge to get people to notice us. But when they do, they come back. The rate of return on guests has been incredibly high."

Clotworthy agrees: "A lot of old members are coming back and finding us again. Plus, we're getting a lot of new people that never dined here before. When they come here, they're glad to discover it, and those that rediscover it find out that it's better than ever. They're glad to be here. I am, too."

