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Food at Delray Beach Golf Club's restaurant draws praise

Delray's overhaul of golf venue's menu draws good reviews.

By Erika Slife
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Delray Beach It was lunchtime at the city's golf club on a recent afternoon and it was salads all around for the lunching ladies.

Cobb salad for Lillian Siegel, Cobb salad without the gorgonzola for Barbara Machtinger and the Donald Ross salad for Doris Grabois, who ordered the special dish named after the famous golf course architect.

"And I got the spinach salad," said Edythe Fisher, part of the quartet that gives themselves an age of "39 and holding."

Her answer ignited quick protests and chuckles from her companions. Turns out, she ordered the Greek salad — with chicken — and the realization sparked a whole other conversation of who likes Greek salad.

It's a finicky group.

But it's customers like these the Delray Beach Municipal Golf Club strives to keep satisfied. City officials have been working extra hard in the past year to improve the golf course menu and service after complaints arose in late 2005 about the restaurant's quality. Last year, the City Commission directed city staff to do something about it.

And they have.

City workers reviewed the restaurant's administration and discovered it was running short a chef and without a manager. They overhauled the cooking process, discarding frozen, bagged and canned goods in exchange for fresh foods, and they tweaked the menu.

The result has been an average rating of 4.76 out of five on satisfaction surveys.

"It's very, very good," said Leslie Powell, who lunched on mini-burgers and fries recently.

"We eat here a lot. We work nearby," added her friend Linda Matthews.

It's serious business for the city, but not for earning a profit. Although the food at the golf course, which includes catering, earns about \$1.2 million a year, the city spends about \$1.12 million to keep the operation going. It's not meant to be a money maker, officials said.



First Name

Last Name

Age

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"It's really to give our residents — to have a facility like that in the community. It's valuable as a meeting place, as well as a golf course," said Vice Mayor Fred Fetzer. "It's done as mainly a community service."

The golf club hosts weddings, bar and bat mitzvahs and anniversary parties every weekend of the year, said catering manager Beth Mullen, who estimates catering makes up 85 percent of the golf course food business. Various neighborhood associations hold their meetings at the club. And the golf club hosts about two tournaments a month from May to October.

"As long as we don't get e-mails and phone calls, then we know we're good," said Sharon Painter, chief executive officer of JCD Sports Group, which holds the \$139,000-a-year contract to manage the restaurant.

To double-check the quality, Assistant City Manager Robert Barcinski eats at the golf club at least once every two weeks. The city also has enlisted "mystery shoppers" to anonymously taste the food and critique the service. On May 20, for example, a mystery shopper wrote, "The Triple Decker Club was flavorful and fresh ... The presentation appeared huge. The texture was perfect."

It was a satisfying review for city officials, but if you ask the lunching ladies, there's always room for improvement.

"Sometimes it's very good," said Siegel. "Sometimes it's ..." And she waved her hand in the air with a nonchalant shrug.

But she does recommend the tuna-stuffed tomato.

Erika Slife can be reached at eslife@sun-sentinel.com or at 561-243-6690.

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