



## Dining with a View

### The University Center Club at Florida State University Delivers on Customer Satisfaction

*Tracy Marple*

**W**ith 3,200 members and growing, The University Center Club at Florida State University keeps focused on making members happy. To accomplish this goal, the club relies on its team of dedicated and talented managers and culinarians to provide the service and quality guests expect. As a result of the staff efforts, during the past seven years, the University Center Club has been awarded the Circle of Excellence four times (2000, 2003, 2005 and 2006), the highest recognition of achievement awarded by ClubCorp, Inc., the largest owner and operator of private clubs in the world.

#### Unique Location & Loyal Staff

The University Center Club is uniquely located within Florida State University's Doak Campbell Stadium, overlooking the field on one side and Florida State University's campus and downtown Tallahassee on the other. The club's meeting and banquet facilities are regarded as some of the finest in Tallahassee. Operations include 64,000 square feet of banquet, dining and private meeting rooms spread over three and one-half floors. There are six private dining rooms and a 7,500 square foot multi-use ballroom that seats 550 or accommodates over 1000 for a stand-up affair. Additionally, there are two 12,000 sq. ft. outdoor decks overlooking the field which can be used for events.

Over the past few months the club's 6th floor, which houses some of the club's prime real estate including the popular Osceola Grill, has undergone quite a few changes. New carpet was installed, wall coverings were replaced, and designer-colored paints chosen for the walls.



Adding an elegant touch, all dining chairs were refinished with The University Center Club logo artfully carved into the chair's wooden backs. New vibrant plants in stylish containers were added to give a little more flair. Member reviews have been very positive.

Of course it takes more than a beautiful facility to keep members happy. Truly it is the club's service ethic that makes a difference. Certainly, the club works to recruit talented employees and puts a premium on training (and retraining) of all staff. But I like to think that our recognition of employees is what sets us apart. Not only does club management recognize employees, but our "STAR" recognition program, where club members recognize employees, helps to build pride. We ask our members to recognize employee's exceptional energy, optimism, pride and passion for exceeding all expectations by filling out a Star Card. We post these and write about them in the club newsletter (now online)

to let everyone know of the extra effort. It is surprising how many members take note and further compliment employees

#### Chefs Offer Members Numerous Options

On the culinary side, this spring the club announced the addition of award winning Executive Chef Tim Drown to its culinary team. Chef Tim relocated to Tallahassee from the Centre Club in Tampa. With the help of Executive Sous Chef, Chris Leynes, the two are making many positive changes to the menu. From the casual to the elegant, members can choose from a variety of dining options. The popular Osceola Grill, where guests can overlook the football field, open for both lunch and dinner, offers a casual menu. Some of the popular choices are fried catfish with cheese grits and New England clam chowder.

Throughout the week for dinner, the club offers signature nights such as Shrimp Buffet, Prime Rib or Barbecue.

The culinary team works very hard to build repeat business. One of the club's popular evening offerings is Tasty Traditions & Nightly Bites" that includes appetizers and tapas that provides great foods at a great price.

For members that prefer an upscale dining experience, the club hosts numerous activities and fine dining in its elegant 5th floor dining area. Chef's Tim's crab cakes vie with chef's Pan Fried Apalachicola Oysters on Wilted Pernoud Crème with Dijon Hollandaise Pancetta Bacon for top menu items.

On game days, the club is well known for its pre-game tailgates serving several thousand guests.

The club has been very proactive in addressing today's healthier dining trends. To stay ahead, the club designed a phased in plan for healthy menu options and cooking techniques. This includes changing to trans fat free oils

## Keeping Ahead of Trends – Zero Trans Fat Training

Last December when New York City passed a law eliminating trans fats in restaurants, trans fats became a major news story and grabbed the attention of the public. But well before New York, the University Center Club at Florida State had prioritized “health” as a key member culinary concern. Armed with a three phase approach to changing menus, oils and cooking techniques, the club was ahead of the curve.

To make sure they were making the transition to zero trans fats in the most effective manner, the chefs at The University Center Club received a good measure of help from materials developed by their procurement company, Avendra, North America’s leading procurement services company and Club Corp.

“It’s easy to make the transition to a zero trans fat menu with good training,” said Cory Dellinger of Avendra, who works with manufacturers on a daily basis helping transition to trans fat free products. “Our goal is to assist our customers in identifying cost effective alternatives containing zero trans fats.” Due to this ongoing work at Avendra, even tough categories like bakery, including pastries and pies are, seeing new trans fat free products that compare very well in taste and texture.

### Here are Some Frequently Asked Questions and Tips:

**Why do I see “Zero Trans Fat” on a food product when I also see “partially hydrogenated oil” as an ingredient?**

Food companies are permitted to list the amount of trans fat as 0 gram on the Nutrition Facts panel and/or claim “Zero or No Trans Fat” if the amount of trans fat per serving is less than 0.5 grams. If you see “0g Trans Fat” the food product contains less than 0.5 g trans fat per serving.

**Why is there no “%” Daily Value (DV) for Trans Fat?**

At this time, there is not sufficient scientific information for the FDA to set a DV for trans fat. Without a DV, a percentage DV cannot be calculated.

**Can I eliminate Trans Fat entirely from my diet?**

Eliminating trans fat from the diet entirely is impractical for most people because trans fats are naturally occurring in some foods such as meat and dairy products.

**Are healthier oils more expensive?**

The cost of zero trans fat oils should not affect the price of menu items. Widely available, traditional vegetable oils containing zero trans fats, such as corn and soy, are already used extensively. Newly marketed trans fat free oils with longer fry lives may cost more per gallon, but may also last longer, potentially making them cost-neutral and cost-beneficial.

### Some Steps to Take in Changing to Zero Trans Fats

Evaluate your current offering and develop zero trans fats specifications.

1. First, center your efforts on the categories containing the most amount of trans fat: (e.g. frying oils, French fries and bakery items)
2. Evaluate current specifications to understand if they contain trans fat.
3. If a product switch is necessary, work with your culinary team to develop a new specification that contains zero trans fat.
4. Filter the changes through the appropriate channels in your organization.

and natural fats in the preparation of all menu items (see sidebar on trans fats).

“We have a membership that is really concerned about health,” said Chef Tim, a diabetic himself. “They are knowledgeable and know the link between trans fats and coronary heart disease, diabetes and other health issues. I try to steer them toward choices that are great tasting, but are more healthful. Therefore, we developed a plan to roll out, follow up and meet certain compliance criteria in switching the club over to zero trans fats.”

Private Events are a continuing source of strength to club operations. Under the leadership of Senior Private Event Director, Pamela Monnier, the University Center Club makes sure it is on the cutting edge of all catering trends, from flowers to wedding cakes to regional and ethnic inspired hors d’oeuvres.

### Innovative Membership Ideas


Membership Directors, Melinda Howell and Abby Perkins, leave no stone unturned to build membership and retain current members. Last year, after winning the Circle of Excellence Award, they held a “Circle of Excellence Membership Referral” promotion. The promotion was a huge success with members successfully referring 175 new members. This year, the membership team developed a similar “Refer One; Reward One” membership promotion that is currently in progress which they hope will surpass last year’s success.

As for club activities, one of the most innovative member activities is dinner theatre nights. In the tradition of the *USO Show* and *I Love You, You’re Perfect, Now Change*, the University Center Club actively works with entertainment producers and venues to bring dinner theatre opportunities to members.

Also, to stimulate interest, the membership team developed the newly formed University Cuvee Club which hosts exciting wine dinners featuring foods from Italy to Australia.

On these nights guests enjoy an exquisite menu selection complimented by wines suggested by the staff. The idea is not only to provide an exceptional culinary experience for members, but to build sales by attracting both members and their guests (potential new members) to the club.

For new members, throughout their first year of membership, the club developed a book of “passport” coupons to encourage them to travel in (dining) style through their first year of membership introducing them to every club product over the first twelve months-including monthly discounts for dinners, lunches, private events, etc.

 **“We have a membership that is really concerned about health...”**

Another successful addition to member activities is the W2W (Women to Women) Club that hosts monthly events including a fun Bunko night.

### Affiliation with FSU Hospitality School Is a Source of Pride to All

A unique aspect of the University Center Club, and a source of great pride to all managers and employees, is the club’s partnership with the Robert H. Dedman Department of Hospitality. This



academic program, a part of the Florida State University School of Business, is ranked by industry professionals as one of the top ten Hospitality Administration Programs in the country. This fall I will teach “Introduction to Hospitality and Tourism,” at the school. I will be joined

by my department heads as guest lecturers to give students a “real world” view of each aspect of the club’s operations.

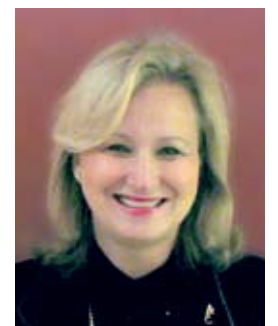
The club also provides internships to students who must complete 1,000 work hours in hospitality to graduate. Specifically, the club provides a practicum experience offering 120 hours of training, where students are rotated through three areas of operations-front of the house, ala carte, and back of the house-so they can get the full picture of running a club.

In the spring of 2008 the club will oversee another course “Restaurant Management,” a class where students will be responsible for operating the restaurant’s grill including creating and developing

a limited menu from concept to table. Students will work under the supervision of club staff to create, cost, order, prepare, promote and market the concepts.

### In Conclusion

It takes a beautiful facility, talented managers, chefs with great ideas, and exceptional people to create a club environment where magic moments occur. The University Center Club’s employees provide that environment. They consistently deliver the best service, quality and value to our members and guests. They have gone above and beyond, working hard, as a team, throughout the year to achieve our goals of increased membership, quality service, customer satisfaction and profitability. 



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