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Restaurant review: Ambience, service make Buckhorn truly special

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BY JOAN NEENO/SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE
October 8, 2015



JOAN NEENO PHOTO

The atmosphere, food and views of Lake Koshkonong at the Buckhorn Supper Club, 11802 N. Charley Bluff Road, Milton, have made it an iconic area restaurant, says

MILTON—A little more than a decade ago, I bought my first house. It was a small place on Lake Koshkonong near Newville.

As a welcoming gift to the area, my Realtor gave me a gift certificate to the Buckhorn Supper Club. What a perfect introduction to the lake and the culture

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Gazette restaurant reviewer Joan Neeno. surrounding it.

BUCKHORN SUPPER CLUB

Address: 11802 N. Charley Bluff Road, Milton.

Phone: 608-868-2653

Website:
thebuckhorn.net

Hours: 5-10 p.m. Friday-Saturday, 5-9 p.m. Sunday.

Reservations:
Accepted

Credit cards:
Accepted

Wheelchair access:
Yes

Vegetarian items:
Yes

Menu: Cheeseburger (\$12.99), homemade onion rings (\$13.99), BBQ pork ribs, half rack (\$26.99), scallops (\$26.99), broasted chicken (\$19.99), pork chops (\$23.99).

Ratings

Food: 3.5 plates

Service: 4 plates

Cost: \$11-\$47

Value: 3 plates

The Buckhorn is an institution. It's also one of the prettiest spots on the lake to sit and enjoy dinner and a drink.

We were there on a warm, early-fall evening to watch the sun paint the lake pink and the moon rise over the ridge. The patio is large, but we've never had luck getting a spot out there during the summer. It's always packed when boaters are active.

In the fall, the Buckhorn's hours are shortened and the crowds become thinner. It's the year-rounders instead of the weekenders who are at the bar, and it's a great time to enjoy this traditional supper club.

We started with a couple of drinks, delivered quickly from the bar, and the baked Brie with garlic shrimp (\$17.99). The dish was basically shrimp scampi with a round of warm Brie in the center served with Ritz-type crackers.

The shrimp were beautifully cooked and seasoned, but the hunk of Brie submerged in olive oil was a bit strange. The combination seemed more like two appetizers that would have been better had they been separated.

It wasn't bad; it was just lacking in cohesion. Honestly, I enjoyed the hot rolls and breadsticks with the traditional cheese spread more than the appetizer.

Our soups were especially good. I had the night's selection—a ham and potato cream soup. The flavor of the ham infused nicely with the cream, and the chunks of potato were soft but not mushy. There were plenty of good-sized



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chunks of tender ham, and the level of salt was just right.

5 plates—Outstanding
4 plates—Above average
3 plates—Average
2 plates—Below average
1 plate—Poor

My husband, Richard, started his meal with the French onion soup. It had a pleasant richness, and the melted cheese on the top was plentiful and appropriately stringy. It was also salted just right.

As his entree, Richard ordered the roast duck with Door County cherry sauce (\$23.99 as a Sunday special, \$27.99 otherwise). He spent a bit extra for the homemade onion rings, which were fresh, crisp, hot and very tasty.

He also received a generous portion of duck that was beautifully cooked. The cherry sauce was just OK. Honestly, it tasted like pie filling more than a sauce. For the most part, he scraped it off and just enjoyed the duck.

I ordered the queen-size filet mignon (\$29.99) topped with blue cheese butter (\$2.99). The Buckhorn seasons, grills and butters its steaks, and that final step really makes a difference. They serve one of the best-seasoned steaks around; unfortunately, it was delivered medium when I ordered medium-rare. It had some pink toward the very center of the steak, but it wasn't uniform. It was still better than the vast majority of steaks I've had at area supper clubs, but that pink center would have made it exceptional.

I should have skipped the blue cheese butter. I thought it was going to be just a pat on top but, instead, the top and sides of the steak were slathered in it. The strong cheese overwhelmed the steak, so I scraped most of it off. No harm done, but it was \$2.99 I could have knocked off our bill.

We've been to the Buckhorn a few times in the past for the excellent Friday fish fry (two pieces of deep fried cod, \$13.99) and the deep-fried shrimp stuffed with crab and cheese (\$24.99), which are good but nothing particularly special.

If you visit the Buckhorn (or any supper club for that matter) to eat anything other than a fish fry special, you likely will have a hefty

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tab. Steak and seafood are expensive, and most of the entrees at the Buckhorn are in \$20-\$35 price range. But you get rolls, soup or salad and a side with that, which makes the cost pretty typical for a supper club. Still, it's not an inexpensive dinner.

Price tag and all, it's classic supper club fare, and the dark-paneled, cozy Buckhorn delivers it beautifully. It's quintessential Wisconsin cuisine served by a very professional, attentive and friendly wait staff.

The combination of classic Wisconsin cuisine and a gorgeous lake view is unmatched in the area. There's a reason people are devoted to the Buckhorn. Sipping a cool vodka gimlet as the sun set across a still lake on a beautiful fall evening, I could understand why.

Joan Neeno is a freelance writer who reviews regional restaurants for The Gazette.



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