

# Good food is a sure bet

Longtime favorites and new  
treats aim to please racing fans

By Amy Owens

Many people will tell you that a day at Keeneland isn't complete without a steaming bowl of Kentucky burgoo, a mouth-watering hot corned beef sandwich or a helping of luscious Kentucky bread pudding with bourbon sauce. These items are the three most popular food offerings among the thousands of fans who attend the races each day during the spring and fall meets—and for good reason.

The preparation of all three longtime favorites has been perfected by Turf Catering Company, which has been Keeneland's exclusive caterer since the track opened in 1936. Founded by the Wolken family in 1920, Turf Catering today also serves the Hot Springs Civic and Convention Center in Arkansas. At Keeneland, Turf Catering's duties cover the two race meets, year-round simulcasting, four horse sales, the track kitchen, special requests from Keeneland staff and numerous public events and private gatherings at the Keeneland Entertainment Center.

"There's always something going on—that's what I tell my sous-chefs," said Turf Catering's Executive Chef, Ed Boutilier, referring to the kitchen staff members who are his second in command. "One of the beauties of this place is we're always doing different food. It's not like a restaurant where you're getting the same items thrown at you night after night. We gear up for big events; we slow back down. We're doing hot dogs one day and we're feeding the Queen of England the next day. That's pretty amazing."



Bill Steaus

For a race meet, Boutilier said his crew will cook about 250 gallons of burgoo each day and will prepare about 20,000 pounds of corned beef, which comes from Chicago. Bowls of burgoo and the corned beef sandwiches are available at stands throughout the grandstand, while bread pudding is served only at Mane Street Wraps on the second level of the grandstand facing the paddock.

"Bread pudding ... our kitchen revolves around it," said Boutilier, who has been with Turf Catering for 15 years. "The production of bread pudding is phenomenal; it's just one of those things. It's an old Wolken family recipe. We use Maker's Mark in our bourbon sauce. People will tell us when there's not enough bourbon in it—they go nuts."

New for the spring meet are a Reuben wrap, which will be featured along with turkey and chicken salad wraps at Mane

Street Wraps, and the return of a smaller hot dog. Other food stands in the grandstand include Blue Moon Barbecue on the third level and Blue Cactus Cantina, featuring Tex-Mex cuisine, on the second level. Fans also can enjoy peanuts, popcorn, hamburgers, nachos, frozen soft-service ice cream and other traditional fare found at sports venues across the country.

As might be expected, feeding everyone at Keeneland during the spring race meet, which averages 15,000 people a day and reaches 30,000 people on the day of the Toyota Blue Grass Stakes (G1), requires a small army. Some 150 people work in the kitchens, and total Turf Catering operations—including servers and bartenders, concessions, volunteer groups and the cleanup crew—will number 700 people.

Despite the demands, Turf Catering does not have a great deal of storage space for food so most everything must be prepared each day.

"From the customer's standpoint, it's hard not to get something fresh here because we have to bring in trucks every day," Boutilier said. "We can't stockpile; there's not enough room."

## Fancier fare

Burgoo, corned beef sandwiches and bread pudding join other selections available in Keeneland's dining rooms, which are on every level of the track.

"We always change our menus in the spring, then they carry over to the fall," Boutilier said.

For the spring meet, the Clubhouse



A Reuben wrap is new on the Keeneland menu.

*continued on page 30*



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Bill Straus

Corned beef sandwiches, Kentucky burgoo and Kentucky bread pudding with Maker's Mark bourbon sauce are popular with Keeneland fans.

## Good food is a sure bet

*continued from page 29*

dining rooms have debuted Cedar Plank Salmon Pecan, a pecan-encrusted salmon filet that is oven roasted on a cedar plank and served with a brown sugar bourbon sauce and the fresh vegetable of the day and baby red potatoes. The second-floor Clubhouse dining room also have a new carving station featuring turkey, roast beef and pit ham and artisan bread baked each day at a local Panera Bread restaurant.

Based on the input of a focus group of 10 Clubhouse members held in January, Turf Catering now offers a proprietor's wine list in the second- and third-floor Clubhouse dining rooms and the fourth-floor corporate boxes and Lafayette Room. The nine selections include Cakebread Chardonnay and Jordan Cabernet Sauvignon from California and Louis Jadot Pouilly Fuisse from France.

### The perfect Cobb

Every day during the race meet, Turf Catering has thousands of food critics, and many are eager to share their opinions. Boutilier recalled the ongoing review of the Cobb salad by former Keeneland President and Trustee James E. "Ted" Bassett. Over the years, Turf Catering has served different versions of the Cobb salad, and Bassett continues to coach Boutilier on the perfect mix.

"Every time, he said this is not a Cobb salad," Boutilier said about Bassett. "(He said) the true Cobb salad is from the Brown Derby restaurant in California.

"We got their recipe, and it says right there on the menu: 'Brown Derby Cobb Salad,'" Boutilier added. The salad contains mixed baby lettuce, watercress, roast chicken, tomatoes, avocado, chopped egg, Roquefort cheese crumbles, chives and crisp bacon with a special dressing.

"The key to it—and this is what Mr. Bassett was always ribbing me about—is it's gotta be chopped fine," Boutilier said. "The pieces are never small enough. He told me he'd make everybody Kentucky Colonels if we'd get the salad right." 🐾

Amy Owens is a freelance writer and editor based in Lexington.

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