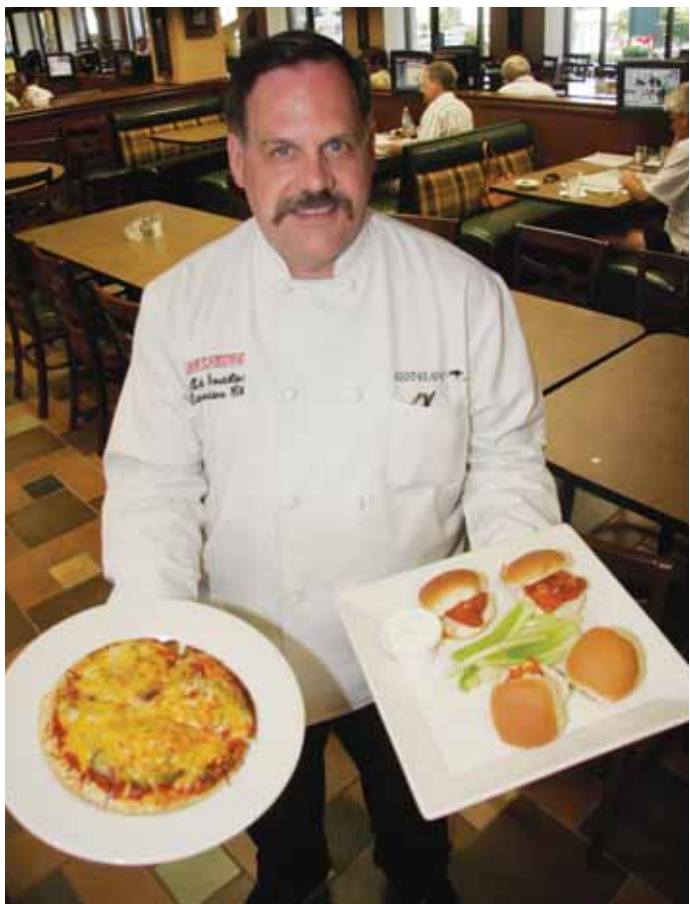


Taste of Keeneland

Racing fans have many good things to eat



Turf Catering Executive Chef Ed Boutilier shows off specialties served in the Equestrian Room at Keeneland.

Photo by Z

By Amy Owens

Keeneland is all about Thoroughbreds. The food isn't bad, either.

In fact, the food is quite good. From the popcorn sold at the concession stands in the Grandstand to the Cedar Plank Salmon Pecan served in the Clubhouse dining rooms, Keeneland takes its food quite seriously. So do many patrons, whose day at the track always includes at least one of Keeneland's specialties: a bowl of Kentucky burgoo, a hot corned beef sandwich or a serving of Kentucky bread pudding with Maker's Mark bourbon sauce.

Since Keeneland held its first race meeting in October 1936, the Wolken family's Turf Catering Co. has been the track's exclusive caterer. Today, Turf Catering's responsibilities cover not only serving racing fans during two race meetings a year, but providing food and beverage for the many handicappers who visit the track around the year for simulcasting. In addition, Turf Catering services the Track Kitchen, which feeds horsemen and is open to the public year-round; the Sales Pavilion, site of four annual horse sales that draw thousands of people from around the world; and the Keene Barn and Entertainment Center, both of which hold numerous events from banquets to fund-raisers to weddings. Turf Catering also handles any special requests from Keeneland staff.

"It really is what makes this job fun," said Executive Chef Ed Boutilier, who has been with Turf Catering for 20

years. "I've worked in restaurants, and it's the same thing every day. It's definitely not the same thing here every day."

Keeneland's spring race meeting averages 15,000 people a day, and the crowd reaches 30,000 people on the day of the Toyota Blue Grass Stakes (G1). To serve all those people, Turf Catering employs some 150 people to work in the kitchens, while its total operations—including servers and bartenders, concessions, volunteer groups and the cleanup crew—numbers 700 people. Adding to Turf Catering's hectic schedule this month is the Keeneland April Two-Year-Olds in Training Sale, which for the first time covers two days, with the evening sessions on April 8-9 beginning at 7 p.m. The second session falls on a race day.

"For the sales, we have a dinner menu," Boutilier said. "We'll serve hand-carved prime rib. But we won't take ourselves too seriously. We'll have chicken wings to go with happy hour. We'll have a blended menu. We'll open for breakfast and we won't close until the last horse is sold."

Mobile diners

Keeneland has more than 20 concession stands located throughout the Grandstand, as well as eight dining rooms on four levels of the Clubhouse that seat a total of 3,000 people. Other amenities with food and beverage service include 23 corporate boxes and a large Press Box that can accommodate the crowd of local and national report-

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ers and photographers at the track to cover the Toyota Blue Grass, a major prep race for the Kentucky Derby (G1).

Most of the thousands of people at Keeneland each day are at the track for the primary purpose of watching and wagering on world-class Thoroughbred racing. In the Grandstand, the speed of food service is important. In the



A hot corned beef sandwich is a Keeneland tradition for many patrons.

Clubhouse, one move that Turf Catering made to better serve patrons can be seen in the main dining room on the second level, which features a buffet with a carvery. The carvery proved extremely popular with diners—and the kitchen staff—during its debut last year. Patrons now are able to eat when they want throughout an afternoon.

“Our Club members are very mobile,” Boutilier said. “They’re always going down to the paddock to look at the

horses or to watch the race. It’s hard for servers to time the service. They can bring all the food out and nobody’s sitting at the table.

“The carvery is such a success because it takes the heat off the kitchen. If we’re serving 100 carveries a day, it means that everyone who orders off the menu is getting better service because we’re not bogging the kitchen down.”



Hot dogs are one of many offerings at concession stands around the track.

Really cooking

For patrons in the Grandstand, concession stands sell traditional fare found at sports venues across the country, including peanuts, pretzels, hamburgers, nachos and frozen soft-serve ice cream. Of the three most popular menu items, burgoo and corned beef sandwiches are available at stands throughout the area, while bread pudding is served only at Mane Street Wraps on the second level of the Grandstand facing the paddock. Mane Street Wraps also offers the popular Reuben, turkey and chicken salad wraps.

Other stands feature additional food choices, including Tex-Mex cuisine at Blue Cactus Cantina (trackside on

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Matt Anderson (Burgoo and Bread Pudding)

Keeneland cuisine at home

Want to enjoy a taste of Keeneland at home?

During the spring and fall race meetings, Turf Catering sells burgoo by the gallon and bread pudding by the pan. Orders may be placed by calling Turf Catering at (859) 253-0541 and picked up at the track.

You also can learn how to make burgoo, bread pudding and other Keeneland specialties at home by watching cooking classes taught by Turf Catering’s Executive Chef, Ed Boutilier, on the track’s website (www.keeneland.com).

the second level of the Grandstand): barbecue pork and beef at Blue Moon Barbecue (trackside on the third level of the Grandstand; and hamburgers, fries, chicken tenders, cheeseburgers, all-beef franks and brats at Brats n Brew (paddock side on the first level of the Grandstand).

The seven full-service and prep kitchens around the racetrack have plenty of work to do to feed patrons. To have sufficient quantities of Keeneland's most favorite food offerings available during a race meeting, 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. He said servings of bread pudding at the concession stands and in the dining rooms reach "about 3,000 orders a week" and comprise "80 percent of our dessert sales."

"Bread pudding is an amazing thing," Boutilier said about the dessert's popularity at Keeneland. "If it's not here, there's a revolt. We're never out."

True taste

Bread pudding supposedly first was made in the 1200s in England, where the main ingredients were stale bread, sugar and spices. Bourbon is a distinctly Southern addition, and Keeneland's bread pudding is made with an old Wolken family recipe. (The use of Maker's Mark in the bourbon sauce is a nod to the Loretto, Kentucky, distillery that since 1977 has sponsored the Grade 1, \$300,000 Maker's Mark Mile, the spring meeting's premiere turf race.)

Now the old favorite is joined by two new kids on the bread pudding block, chocolate chip bread pudding with Belgian chocolate sauce made with Godiva Liqueur and a Bananas Foster bread pudding, which features a caramel sauce with bananas. Traditional bread pudding and the chocolate chip bread pudding are available in the Grandstand at Mane Street Wraps; all three versions are available in the Clubhouse dining rooms.

Tales of Keeneland's bread pudding apparently have traveled far and wide. Earlier this year, a writer for *Food & Wine* magazine called Boutilier to discuss the truth behind a story about



Kentucky bread pudding, Keeneland style.

an ingredient that supposedly was used in the dessert because it was left over from its original intent.

"The writer had heard that we use hot dog buns in our bread pudding," Boutilier said. "I said, 'No we don't. We use Sister Schubert rolls.' It's been that way. Maybe years and years ago they might have used hot dog buns, but hot dog buns disintegrate (when used in bread pudding). I've tried it. It's funny that that story had gotten all the way to New York." 🐜

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

Kentucky bread pudding with Maker's Mark bourbon sauce

Serves 10-12 people

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|------------------------------|----------------------|
| 1/2 gallon milk | 2 cups sugar |
| 2 teaspoons vanilla | 8 eggs, beaten |
| 2-3 quarts cubed white bread | 1 cup golden raisins |
| 1 tablespoon cinnamon | |

Whisk sugar into milk until sugar is dissolved. Add eggs and vanilla and stir. Soak bread in mix for several hours or overnight. Pour into glass or stainless pan. Sprinkle with raisins and cinnamon and "push" into mix. Bake at 250 degrees for approximately 1 1/2 hours or until firm.

Maker's Mark bourbon sauce

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|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1 pound butter | 2 pounds powdered sugar |
| 1 cup Maker's Mark bourbon | |

Let butter become soft at room temperature. Add powdered sugar. Whip bourbon into butter and powdered sugar until it is the consistency of frosting. Ladle sauce over hot bread pudding, and it will melt on its own.