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## Sweetbriar Grill tees up winning fish dishes

By Tina Johansson

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WAUCONDA TOWNSHIP — The restaurant at Stonewall Orchard Golf Club is a hidden oasis for fish fry lovers.

Head west near Volo where an expansive 18-hole golf club lies. The drive up is long and winding, but soon you will find Sweetbriar Grill at the club, ready to offer great food and great service.

Mundelein residents Jan and Dennis Huffaker said they stop in on some Fridays and enjoy sitting out on the patio when they come here. This night was a bit chilly so they opted to dine in the clubhouse overlooking the emerald green course and its lovely pond where ducks and geese swam. “We just think it’s terrific here,” said Jan.

The Huffakers remarked positively about the food. “This is the best clam chowder I’ve ever had,” said Dennis. Friday dinners include either salad or soup of the day, or New England clam chowder.

In fact, the homemade soup creations by Chef Michael Dell are so well-liked, according to Jeff Pajula, general manager and head golf professional, that employees from nearby Baxter Healthcare Corp. make it a daily ritual to call the place to find out what kind they’re serving.

Dell who hails from Atlanta, has been a longtime “country club” chef. From the crispy dill pickle chips coated in cornmeal and fried golden, to the red beans and rice soup, to the Southern chicken breast he concocted for a recent Friday night dinner, Dell has definitely brought some of his Southern-tinged flavors to the table.

Ted and Karen Hook of Volo had driven past the place hundreds of times and figured it was finally worth a stop.

“We saw the sign that says fish fry and that drew us in,” said Karen. “We really like the view here.”

As Ted waited on his potato-crusting grouper and his wife on her sautéed walleye, he commented that part of the place used to be an apple orchard — hence the name. In fact, several apple trees from the original orchard remain.

Mazie Sargent of Grayslake, one of the golf club’s owners, said her late husband Bo farmed the land. He had cattle, and planted corn and soy beans.

Nearly every Friday, Sargent heads to the place for dinner, mostly with family and friends. And she said,

she enjoys the food and has a fondness for the chef, adding, “I absolutely adore him.”

Each Friday night, Chef Dell makes a different flavor cobbler as a tasty way to end the meal. On this particular night a cherry-chocolate cobbler was served.

Throughout the week, the lunch crowd has their choice of sandwiches and salads at the restaurant. The chef also cooks out on the grill often for golfers and guests, one of his favorite jobs, he said.

Sweetbriar Grill caters golf events, corporate functions, weddings and other parties. Stonewall Orchard is host to the Illinois PGA Section Championship, as well as past host for the U.S. Open local qualifier. Pajula noted that Gary Player is among the more famous golfers that have played there.

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