

FRIENDS

grille + bar

by KAY HARRIS photos by BRANDON POWERS

From the moment you are greeted at the door 'til the time you head for home, your visit to Friends Grille and Bar will make you feel special; like a part of the family.

Owners, Chef Randy DeCoudres and Chris Manwell, work hard to ensure a genuine and friendly atmosphere is maintained throughout your dining experience. They want you to know you are among friends, either as a new guest or a regular customer, giving everyone the same personal attention and friendly service.

The pair have transformed the popular eatery in Summit Pointe into a dining mecca for locals, many of whom have "their tables" where they regularly eat. But even if you're not from Valdosta, you'll still be welcomed just as warmly and enjoy your dining experience as part of the in-crowd.

From the fabulous food, crafted around seasonal, locally grown fruits and vegetables, to the delightful cocktails, Friends has been updated and reinvented while still remaining true to its original concept.

From Two Friends to Friends

Chef DeCoudres brought his many years of experience to Two Friends Cafe in 2010. Trained at Le Cordon Bleu in Scottsdale, Ariz., DeCoudres established dinner service at the restaurant, created new dishes and brought a fresh perspective to the concept.

After the original owner, Brenda Anderson, decided to sell Two Friends, DeCoudres and business partner Chris Manwell bought the restaurant in April 2013 and began making plans for the future. Those plans came to fruition in October 2013 when they closed the restaurant for a couple of weeks for a complete renovation and remodeling of everything from the kitchen forward. And they changed the name to Friends Grille and Bar.

RIGHT: Front of House Manager Justin Stephens prepares a 'New Fashioned', a signature cocktail, comprised of Maker's Mark 46, peach bitters, fresh orange, honey and a splash of soda.

RIGHT MIDDLE: House infused vodkas are a specialty at Friends. (left to right) Jalapeño, lemon, orange, and strawberry vodkas.

FAR RIGHT: Friends Grille and Bar offers a selection of signature cocktails including a fresh take on the old fashioned called the 'New Fashioned' and a house infused jalapeño vodka cocktail with mango syrup and lemon juice called the 'Big Woolly Mammoth'.



Friends Grille and Bar co-owners chef Randy DeCoudres (left) and Chris Manwell purchased the restaurant, formerly Two Friends Cafe, in April of 2013.



Chef Randy DeCoudres keeps the menu fresh with seasonal produce and many locally sourced items.



BELOW: (clockwise from left) A 20oz prime bone-in ribeye, choice cut 15oz boneless ribeye, 8oz filet mignon and a 10oz sirloin are the stars of Friend's steak selection.



What's New

Beginning with a fresh design, the kitchen was remodeled to ensure maximum efficiency while maintaining the open design that customers love so much. A small patio off the back of the restaurant was enclosed and is now the wait staff prep area, while the front porch has been expanded to seat 40 or so guests. Heat lamps and ceiling fans ensure that customers are comfortable regardless of the temperature outside.

In the main dining room, the fireplace was removed to open up the entire space. Large paintings on the wall serve a dual purpose – they add color to the room while also helping with acoustics.

Manwell points out that even the bottom of each chair is carpeted underneath to add additional sound proofing. The guest experience is of utmost importance to the new owners, and other unique elements are being incorporated into the design.



A pair of salads wait to be served as the lunch service begins.



Diners will find a wine for every taste and dish available by the glass or bottle.

“We are going to hang photos of our loyal, regular customers on the walls,” said Manwell, to acknowledge loyal customers and add a hometown feel to the restaurant.

The former market area that had been repurposed into a makeshift bar is now a dining area that can be closed off for larger parties. The small dining room near the kitchen has been completely redone and is now a bar with several tables as well as bar seating.

“You remember the Remerton Mill?” Manwell asks. “When they tore it down, we were able to get some of the tin roofing and that’s what you see around our banquette in front of the kitchen. The wood top of the bar is also wood from the old mill. We wanted to preserve some of our local history here.”

Bartender and Front of House Manager Justin Stephens has a large new space to work in to craft his signature cocktails – even infusing his own flavored vodkas rather than buying pre-flavored ones to ensure the drinks have the freshest and most unique taste. On a recent morning, the lemon and strawberry look inviting but the jalapeno flavor may take some convincing to try.

Stephens maintains an extensive wine selection for customers, half a dozen draft beers, and pretty much anything else a customer can request. A new pass through window from the kitchen ensures that bar patrons can



The Old Fashioned Chicken Salad Plate is a house favorite. Served on a bed of baby greens and a side of fresh fruit salad.

enjoy snacks or a meal without having to move to the dining area.

Customers typically have their favorite seats, says Manwell, and many want to sit in the chef’s seats at the banquette.

“They enjoy the interaction with the kitchen staff.”

Customers can also watch pastry chef Juli Powell prepare one of Friends’ signature desserts for them, including the perennial favorite bread pudding.

“We offer seasonal desserts, like our pumpkin cheesecake last fall and our peppermint cheesecake through the holidays,” says DeCoudres, “and there will always be something chocolate on the dessert menu!”



The apple crostata, a free form apple tart served with vanilla ice cream topped with a homemade caramel drizzle.

Favorite menu items will also always include steaks and prime rib, but Chef DeCoudres ensures that there are plenty of seafood, chicken and pasta dishes, always made with the freshest ingredients and locally grown, seasonal vegetables. Even brussels sprouts are transformed in the chef’s hands into a delicious side dish!



A chocolate marscarpone pot topped with sweetened whipped cream and chocolate ganache.

Maintaining a family atmosphere with employees and customers alike, Friends Grille and Bar has stayed true to the neighborhood feeling that the restaurant has always had while elevating the food and the decor to another level, creating a new and unique dining experience in Valdosta.



Warm bread pudding topped with a bourbon sauce is Friends’ signature dessert.

Friends Grille and Bar is open for breakfast, lunch and dinner Tuesday through Saturday, and now also offers Sunday brunch.

FRIENDS

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Serving Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

Come try The Burger at lunch!

New Expanded Lunch Menu!



Join us in the bar for Ribs + Whiskey
Happy Hour 4 to 6pm Tuesday-Friday!

Summit Pointe • Suite B • Valdosta
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