

Buckhorn sets state's supper club standard

Revision of story by Mary Bergin from last year's Lakes Edition

The fish boil is a summer tradition in Wisconsin, particularly in Door County, and a part of the show is seeing the quick flash of flames that causes a boilover.

Much more rare in the Badger State is a lobster boil, which involves just as much showmanship, and it happens 10 times from late May through October at the Buckhorn Supper Club, the only

supper club accessible by boat on 10,600-acre Lake Koshkonong.

The lobster boils happen on designated Tuesdays and Wednesdays, days when the supper club would not otherwise be open. Owners Chico and Dawn Pope order 90 lobsters from Maine for each boil.

The evening begins with the parade of the crustaceans to their final bath outdoors. Diners bring cameras and pick up the clawing seafood before cooking begins. A

splash of fuel at the end produces a flash of fire and overboil, a sign that dinner is ready. The bar opens at 5 p.m. and dinner is served at 6:30.

Boiled red potatoes, sweet corn, dinner rolls, Caesar salad and an array of dessert bars round out the meal, which is served buffet style. Wine with the meal is included, too, and in the background is easy-listening music by a keyboardist who also sings. Before the evening ends, diners might be singing along and dancing.

This year, lobster boils at the Buckhorn will be held May 30, June 26-27, July 24-25, Aug. 28-29, Sept. 25-26 and Oct. 31 (this date is also a costume party). Cost is \$70 per person. Lobster boils attendance is by reservations only and reservations need to be pre-paid. Make plans ASAP, as the boils usually sell out weeks in advance.

The Popes have owned the Buckhorn for more than two decades. Son Kevin Pope has been the chef for most of those years, and daughter Shelley Huhnke handles front-of-the-house business.

The little Buckhorn Bar in the 1930s was all about burgers, beer and fish bait—not full-service dining. With time, the menu grew.

Dawn Pope was just a baby when her parents started bringing her here in 1953; she would play with the Buckhorn's

daughters while her parents had a night out of eating fish and dancing.

Were it not for Chico and Dawn Pope's intervention in 1997, the building might well have been torn down for condominium development.

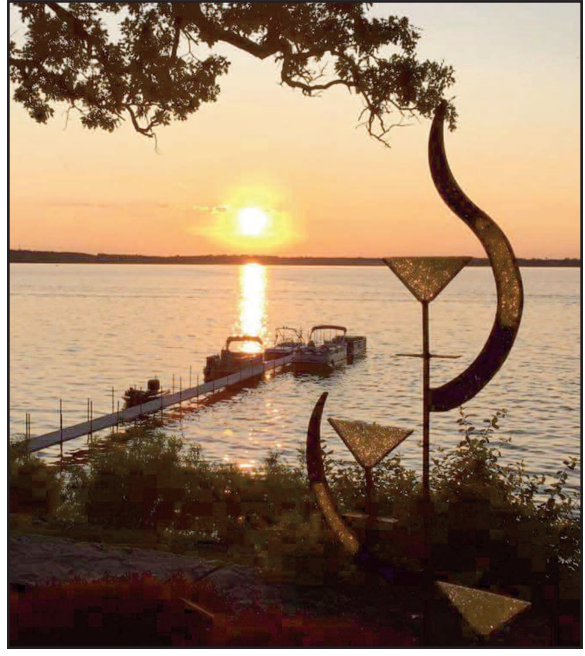
Roast prime rib is the top seller today and offered every night the Buckhorn is open (except lobster nights). Each log of the beef roasts at least 12 hours.

"We still believe in seasoning all meat and seafood coming out from the kitchen," Chico Pope says. "We make our seasonings, and the flavor is evident on every dish. We also put melted butter on almost every dish, just for that extra flavor profile."

The top-selling dessert is chocolate peanut butter pie, and the top-selling appetizer is the baked brie with garlic shrimp. House-made beer-cheese spread shows up on every dining table.



Chico and Dawn Pope relax with a bit of wine at the Buckhorn. (Submitted photo)



You will love the view from the Buckhorn Supper Club. (Submitted photo)

What's more, the Buckhorn incorporates a bevy of locally-grown and made ingredients in its scrumptious offerings. For example, your meal could include the Jones Dairy Farm Hickory Smoked Bacon-wrapped scallops as an appetizer, followed by the honey barbecue salmon utilizing Chico Pope's own home-harvested honey. The establishment also sows and reaps its own herbs from a straw bale garden.

Another impressive aspect of the Buckhorn is the relaxing ambiance it showcases. The supper club offers lakefront dining, tailor-made for viewing beautiful Lake Koshkonong sunsets. And for boaters, the Buckhorn sports an easy-access pier.

Wisconsin's endearing

family-owned supper club tradition is modeled well at the Buckhorn. So much so that the Wisconsin Department of Tourism used the Buckhorn to film a television commercial about supper clubs last year. "When you're having fun, we're having fun" is the closing slogan.

Accolades are also pouring in for the Buckhorn locally. For instance, the Rock Koshkonong Business Association recently announced the winners of its "Best of Kosh" 2018 contest, which allowed the public to vote on the offerings of area establishments. This year, the Buckhorn took home "Best Prime Rib" honors for the second year in a row. Last year it also won for "Best Old Fashioned."

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Above: Chef Kevin Pope begins the lobster boil as diners watch at Buckhorn Supper Club, near Milton. Below: The fixed-price meal also includes salad and an array of desserts, served buffet style. (Submitted photo above; photo by Mary Bergin below)



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