

Little Bit of Munich



Das Boot Camp, Royal Bavaria to Celebrate Oktoberfest Norman Style

For most Normanites, October is all about college football. But for Andy and Laura Gmeiner, owners of Norman's traditional German eateries Das Boot Camp and Royal Bavaria, October is also about honoring more than 200 years of Bavarian tradition, Oktoberfest.

Born and raised in Munich, Germany, Chef Andy Gmeiner is one of only 67 certified Master Chefs in the United States, and he has made his home in Norman. Although he didn't take ownership of Royal Bavaria until 2008, Andy Gmeiner has been involved with the dinner-only restaurant since it opened in 1994.

"He literally is the mastermind behind everything," Laura Gmeiner said. "He is the chef, he wrote all the recipes, he even brews the beer."

The couple opened Das Boot Camp in 2012 to provide people with a place to enjoy German food, football and family all in one spot, and not just at dinnertime.

On the other hand, Oktoberfest got its start in 1810 as a royal wedding celebration. Today, the Munich-based festival draws some six million visitors from around the globe, earning it the title of world's largest folk festival, according to the event's official website.

While others around the world may travel to Germany this time of year, most people in Norman prefer to stick closer to home during football season. Fortunately, the Gmeiners understand the Norman community's Oktoberfest dilemma, so each year, they bring Oktoberfest to Das Boot Camp at the corner of Main and Crawford in downtown Norman.

Not only can customers count on them to have the big game on the big screens, Das Boot Camp offers authentic Oktoberfest favorites, including rotisserie chicken, giant pretzels and, of course, beer.

"In Germany, people go to Oktoberfest to get the rotisserie chicken because it's a spitfire rotisserie," Laura Gmeiner said. "They don't traditionally have that year-round. That's an Oktoberfest special."

Das Boot Camp's rotisserie chicken is styled after the immensely popular dish served at the festival. The large pretzels are imported directly from Oktoberfest. And the signature Oktoberfest beer, well, that's brewed by Royal Bavaria according to German purity laws, meaning that the flavor profiles are derived directly from natural ingredients.

Royal Bavaria's Oktoberfest beer is an American-style Märzen with a long German history.

"I love our Oktoberfest because it's an amber and you can get that nice, roasted-nut flavor on it, but it's not bitter and you get a nice smooth finish," Laura Gmeiner said. "It's not too heavy and not too light — you can really taste the flavors in it."

The Royal Bavaria restaurant, brewery and fenced-in beergarten is located on Sooner Road, just north of Norman, and it features free live music events on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays.

Both restaurants are family-friendly, and patrons may even get a surprise visit from the Gmeiner's daughters, who occasionally like to help their parents by ensuring that customers are enjoying themselves.

"If they're here, they'll come talk to tables and ask how they're doing," Laura Gmeiner said. "Our youngest used to get dropped off here, and one day, I looked around and didn't see her. She had plopped herself at a table with customers and was having a great old conversation with them. She just pulled a chair up and sat down."

Because of their traditional German style, Das Boot Camp and Royal Bavaria's commitment to serving good food, craft beer, live music, a cozy family atmosphere and football have made them a Norman staple. — BSM