

An ace of a restaurant

By Scott Joseph

I do not play golf and I don't fancy being around people who do nothing but talk about what a great game it is.

So I was not looking forward to visiting a restaurant named after one of golfing's legends. After all, how good could food be coming from people who wear lime green and yellow checked polyester pants?

What a pleasant surprise I found at Sam Snead's Tavern. It is a classy place, tastefully decorated and operated with careful attention to service and customer satisfaction. This is a heckuva good restaurant.

Not the least of its strong points is the menu, a well-thought-out mix of steaks, chicken, sandwiches and pasta dishes. The food is expertly prepared with a touch of creativity here and there. The portions are ample and the quality is . . . let's get it over with right here . . . way above par.

Most appetizers are more than one person can handle. The oven-baked smoked chicken pizza (\$5.75) was more than two people could handle. My dinner guest and I both enjoyed the fresh crust, monterey jack cheese and sweet peppers.

We liked the smoky flavor of the chicken but wished there had been more of it (and a little less olive oil). Still, we had to leave a couple of slices behind.

The parmesan-coated fried brie (\$6.65) was another substantial serving. The gooey cheese was served with fruit and bread along with a mustard sauce. The serving of niblicks (\$4.95) — deep-fried pockets stuffed with a spicy mix of smoked chicken, peppers and cheese — was a more manageable portion and one of the better appetizers.

The Tavern onion soup (\$3.25) was a gustable crock of sweet onions in a rich stock topped with provolone and parmesan cheeses. Black bean soup (\$2.95) wasn't as exciting. The sherry and diced onions couldn't do anything for the otherwise bland flavor.

Entrees include an impressive salad of crispy cold greens on a chilled plate (chilled fork, too) and fresh bread, with



PHOTO BY PHELAN M. EBENHACK

Sam Snead's Tavern

2461 S. Hiawassee Road (near Metro West)

Scott's recommendation:

Whether you're a golfer or not, Sam Snead's Tavern is a great place to eat. Just about everything is done well. Order the pizza or brie appetizers to share. For entrees, go for the almost-boneless chicken or the

butter and an odd spread made with parmesan cheese (that one needs work).

My favorite entree was the whole boneless marinated chicken (\$9.95), the juiciest chicken to come my way in recent memory. The bird, which isn't totally boneless if you count the wings, is split and served on the plate spread

pasta putanesca. You have to try the chocolate sack, but expect stares from other diners.

Phone: (407) 295-9999

Days: Lunch and dinner daily

Reservations: Accepted

Non-smoking section: Yes

Credit: AE, DC, MC, V

eagle (spread chicken?). The flavor is sweet and smoky from the oak wood used in the fired grill.

The oak figures into a lot of the entrees. The 12-ounce top sirloin (\$12.95) was similarly grilled but a thin cut compromised its juiciness.

The pasta putanesca (\$11.95) was a treasure-trove of fresh flavors with arti-

chokes, capers, black olives and peppers in a chunky, spicy tomato sauce, served over fresh fettucine noodles.

One of my dinner guests wanted something lighter and ordered the grilled tenderloin steak sandwich (\$7.50). Not lighter. It's a half-pound of tender steak served on a huge roll with grilled onions. It's much easier to eat with a knife and fork than to hold like a sandwich.

Dessert deserves some special attention. Do not order the chocolate sack (\$6.95) by yourself — invite your family and friends to enjoy it with you. It's a shell of chocolate in the shape of a paper bag that stands about seven inches high. It holds sponge cake and chocolate mousse and has whipped cream spilling over the top. All this sits in a tangy raspberry coulis.

It's overwhelming and has to be experienced.

There are the inevitable golf references but nothing strained or cheeky. Water glasses shaped like golf bags are the biggest stretch.

The decor of the restaurant belies the tavern's name. Rich dark wood paneling and deep green wall coverings make it a pleasant place to dine. Sam Snead's personal mementos from his golfing career, including old clubs and framed personal notes from presidents and other public figures, sort of make the place a golfing equivalent to Hard Rock Cafe.

Adding to the pleasure of dining here is the able serving staff headed by visible and concerned managers. Friendly, efficient and knowledgeable.

There is full bar service as well as a wine list, which includes several nice selections for \$15. The restrooms are wheelchair friendly.

Sam Snead is not involved in the operation of the restaurant. But he gave the owners permission to use his name and these restaurant pros are taking good care of it.

Scott Joseph dines at least twice — anonymously — at each restaurant he reviews.