



Wines down South

2009-2010



DINING WITH THE GREATEST GENERATION 57th Fighter Group-Romance, Wine and Food

By Doc Lawrence

It's nestled in a place alongside the south end of the runway. Dining here in brings up images of HBO's "Band of Brothers" and "The Pacific." Jeeps, fighter planes, army ambulances and military paraphernalia line the road to the entrance. Welcome to the reborn 57th Fighter Group restaurant at Peachtree-Dekalb Airport where the imagination suggests that World War II isn't quite over and soldiers before being shipped out, enjoy fine dining, great wines and superb cocktails complete with beautiful ladies.

Pat Epps, owner of Epps Aviation at the airport, saved the restaurant from the wrecking ball, and true to his never-say-die vision and energy, refurbished everything, bringing in a staff headed by veteran restaurateur Patricia Clancy. The launch has been a glowing success. Not surprising since Epps is the unofficial father of aviation in Georgia and a driven entrepreneur.

In 2005, Epps gave a birthday party at Peachtree-Dekalb for his friend General Paul Tibbitts, the pilot who commanded the B-29 "Flying Fortress" that dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. Attending his party in the enormous hanger were members of the Tuskegee Airmen and surviving pilots from the U.S, Canada and other countries. Epps gives great parties. There was a Glenn Miller-like big band, a dance floor, lots of great dancing (my, those old guys and their children really jitterbug) plus wonderful food, wine and cocktails. Perhaps Epps' restaurant, the 57th was born that night.

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Noted aviation legend Pat Epps (on far right), owner of the 57th Fighter Group Restaurant at Peachtree-Dekalb Airport, brought in veteran restaurant wizard Tricia Clancy and Chef Brent King to create a dining experience to equal many of the finest found in Buckhead and Midtown. The restaurant sits alongside the runways offering stunning views of sleek jets in motion and has a gourmet menu, full bar and an impressive wine list. The patio is spectacular. - Photo by Doc Lawrence



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DINING BEFORE TAKEOFF

The dining rooms, bar, and dance floor has large glass walls allowing maximum views of the sleek jets, small aircraft and occasional biplanes landing and taking off. The Goodyear blimps headquarter here during major sporting events. The scenery has no equal in the state and the dining dynamic has to be experienced.

Along with Chef Brent King, Ms. Clancy devised a regularly revised menu with enough diversity to satisfy a cross-section of local diners, offering gourmet dishes with added Southern flair. For lunch, there's the fried grouper sandwich, Florida's culinary treasure. The extensive dinner menu is more fancy, offering up fresh fish, steaks, pork loin and delights from the chef's imagination. The wine list caught my eye because it reflects management's mission to offer appropriate selections comparable to many Buckhead restaurants, serving by the glass or bottle at reasonable prices. Persimmon Creek's Seyval Blanc and Cabernet Franc and Tiger Mountain's Malbec and Viognier are outstanding wines from two heralded wineries in Rabun County, Georgia. "We plan to feature more local wines," Ms. Clancy says, "and hope our customers enjoy them as much as we do." And, there are creative cocktails from a full service bar.



IN THE MOOD

Once Atlanta had many fine dining restaurants offering live music with dancing. The 57th reprises this tradition with a large dance floor and live music on weekends. A cocktail before dinner, some wine to accompany that steak, and perhaps an after dinner drink encourages dancing. Start slow and then work up to the faster beats for everything from West Coast Swing to Salsa and an occasional Tango. Need a little fresh air? The 57th's patio is safely near the runway and on a clear night the Atlanta sky is juxtaposed with runway lights, spectacular aircraft and the ever-present sounds of appropriate music.



The 57th offers several advantages. One is abundant, convenient parking with handicap access the way it should be-easy. From the acres of grounds to the auspicious entrance into the various dining rooms, bars, dance floor and the magnetic pull of the outdoor patio, artifacts of World War II are omnipresent. It's almost live theater, the drama of an original dining experience. Here, you take your time, lingering to absorb everything.

The restaurant hours are those you would normally expect to find in a luxury hotel. Open every day from late morning into evening dining, with a grill menu at the bar and patio.

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According to Ms. Clancy, the wonderful Sunday brunch-one of the most family friendly in the Southeast-often runs at capacity. After all, it's not just the kids who marvel at the colorful panorama filled with jets, biplanes, and large and small aircraft. Adults get a little bug-eyed as well.

With the 57th, Pat Epps has added significantly to his commendable accomplishments. While other entrepreneurs might be content with having fashioned

this airport into a heralded aviation center, Epps wanted a fine restaurant in this remarkably exciting venue and, of course, he succeeded.

www.the57threstaurant.com

