

Eye on World & Local

Restaurant Review: Firecreek Restaurant + Bar

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Firecreek Restaurant and Bar is the newest jewel of upscale dining in the area. The American cuisine restaurant which boasts an open kitchen, chef's guest table, al fresco bar, lounge and aesthetically pleasing "W" room, which can be reserved for intimate private gatherings and that features quaint artifacts from the former mill along with a working fireplace. Firecreek is a must-visit this holiday season for students, faculty and administrators.

Located a scant 25 minutes from campus, near the intersection of Routes 352 and 30, Firecreek sits in a beautifully converted paper mill on the banks of the Brandywine Creek in nearby Downingtown.

Visitors to the versatile eatery, which is suitable for date night, special occasions with family and friends or taking in a ballgame with acquaintances, can expect a warm reception at every station. Upon my visit I found hosts and servers to be as friendly as they were polite and all staff – including acclaimed executive chef Carlo de Marco – more than willing to accommodate any special requests.

Dining at Firecreek is certainly an ambiance exuding experience. One step inside the main dining area reveals a beautifully renovated restaurant complete with tea light-filled tables, original stone walls, high ceilings, exposed steel beams, soft lighting, and charming relics from the old paper mill. In the center of the restaurant is a fabulous opera-style kitchen that is adjacent to an 18-person chef's table that gives patrons a chance to have an up close and personal experience with the chef-of-the-night.

And while the people at Firecreek know just how to create the proper dining mood, it was easily their culinary masterpieces that were the stars of this night.

For starters, Firecreek appetizers provided an exciting new twist on familiar favorites such as steamed mussels, seared scallops, New England clam chowder and French onion soup. But it was their specialties like the flash-fried salt and pepper calamari with its lightly breaded and seasoned coating coupled with cilantro lime aioli filled with toasted pumpkin seeds and their smooth roasted butternut with apple cider bisque that convinced me that this was a visit worth making again.

Resisting filling up on the appetizers and the complimentary warm rolls with their delicious in-house chipotle honey butter wasn't easy, but I was confident the restaurant's entrees would stand out.

Firecreek's seasonal dinner menu offers the typical cuts of meat that you would expect in an upper-end restaurant including grilled filet mignon, New York strip steak, and Angus Delmonico. It also has several seafood selections such as roasted salmon, sautéed Florida grouper, barbecue shrimp, and rainbow trout.

I tried two entrees: the grilled swordfish Oscar with jumbo lump crabmeat and the java pork tenderloin, both Firecreek signature dishes, according to my server. Neither entrée disappointed.

The swordfish was cooked perfectly and the crabmeat that topped the fish was ample and

fresh. The sides which consisted of glazed carrot strips and mashed potatoes, while less compelling, were a fine compliment to the entrée.

The grilled java pork tenderloin was equally tasty. The dish was sweet and smoky and cooked just on the edge of medium well, which left the meat moist and full of flavor. The plate was garnished with a slice of fried plantain and complimented by a buttery smooth side of mashed sweet potatoes and fresh mango salsa which made this entree an instant favorite. The food exceeded expectations for taste and presentation. It was clear why both dishes had reached "signature" status.

Dessert choices were somewhat limited; however, if you visit, the apple cider donut bread pudding is a must-have. This light cake-like treat is served warm, topped with fresh apple slices and sprinkled with powdered sugar. If you like apple cider donuts, you will love this perfect after dinner complement.

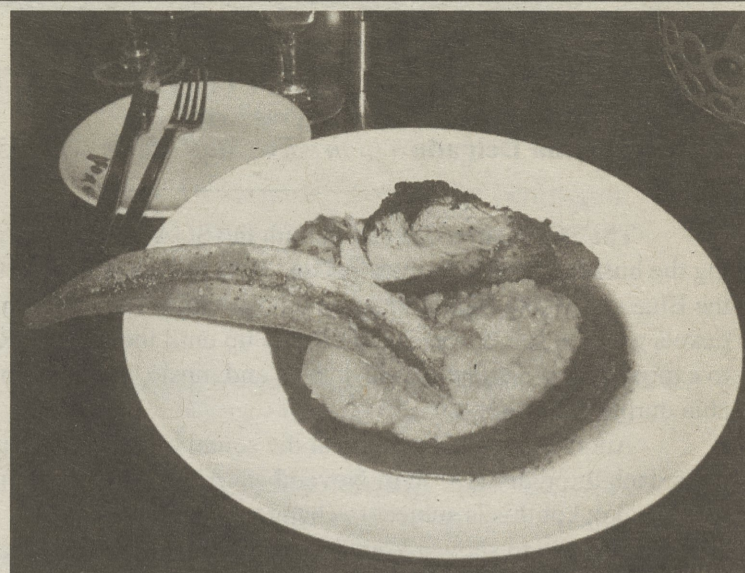
Throughout the meal it was apparent that Firecreek's emphasis on high-quality customer experiences was more than lip service. Servers were quick, responsive and efficient. And while Firecreek seemed to be fully staffed, its affable general manager and Penn State alum, Josh Burchell, could be seen tableside fully engaged in serving patrons and helping to make each feel welcome.

Firecreek's dining atmosphere is like few other fine dining establishments of its caliber. Even with an active bar and no dividing walls, the restaurant seems to coexist successfully through a balanced floor plan and good spacing. Renovation wonderments are plenty in this space and all work together seamlessly to help maintain the charm of the 105 year-old paper mill while incorporating stylish touches common to more modern dwellings.

Parking on premises is ample and prices are relatively reasonable. A three-course dinner for two excluding alcoholic beverages and tip will total about \$100, which is in line with other high-quality restaurants in the area. Firecreek provides a variety of libations from its full bar, including 22 varieties of beer and a wine stock that includes over 200 bottles of wine – offering everything from a \$22 merlot to a \$250 bottle of meritage.

Attire for Firecreek patrons runs the gamut from jeans to overcoats, although most seem to opt for upscale casual wear. During warm weather periods outdoor seating on the patio overlooking the creek is also available.

Weekend visitors to Firecreek would do well to make reservations through the restaurant's website at www.firecreek.com or by calling 610-269-6000. Firecreek can have wait times for seating of an hour or more on Friday and Saturday evenings. But, that should not be surprising. The food is tantalizing, the service is excellent and – with prices that put the fine dining experience within reach of patrons of all financial walks – Firecreek Restaurant and Bar is a sure-fire winner.



(Top): Grilled java pork tenderloin, mashed sweet potatoes, fried plantain, and fresh mango salsa; (Bottom): Grilled swordfish Oscar with jumbo lump crabmeat. Both served at Firecreek Restaurant + Bar in Downingtown, Pennsylvania. (Photos courtesy of Kelly Ann Woods, Lion's Eye Staff Writer)



Give a Year; Change the World: City Year, Apply Now

By Christina Felizzi - *Editor in Chief* - clf5050@psu.edu

Every 26 seconds, a student drops out of high school. That means, in a year's time, thousands of students will not have received their high school diplomas or an education that they deserve. The vision of AmeriCorp's program, City Year, wants to act on this statistic and pave the way for children to become students, to become graduates.

Founded in 1988, City Year is an organization based on youth leadership, teaching and mentoring in the large cities of America and South Africa and its one of the largest youth service corps in the United States. City Year's volunteers, called "corps members," serve full time for 10 months as role models, tutors, mentors, and leaders of in-school and after-school activities, as stated on City Year's official website.

Their slogan, "Give a Year. Change the World," rings true throughout City Year's efforts which utilize and incorporate the enthusiasm, talent, and motivation of the corps members to help students in elementary, middle, and high schools succeed. In 19 different locations throughout the United States and one in Johannesburg, South Africa, corps members, depending on which program they're in, will assist teachers in the classroom, engage in one-on-one tutoring for the students, organize clubs and after-school activities, conduct personal lesson plans on recycling or violence-awareness, and so on; all in a 10 hour day. The U.S. Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, remarks, "You have to have folks with our students every single day, making a difference in their lives. That's what City Year does, with its diversity, with its long term commitment, with its passionate young people. There's no one else I know of in the country who is having that kind of impact."

Continued on Page 5