



BREWS & FOOD

at Cold Creek Tavern

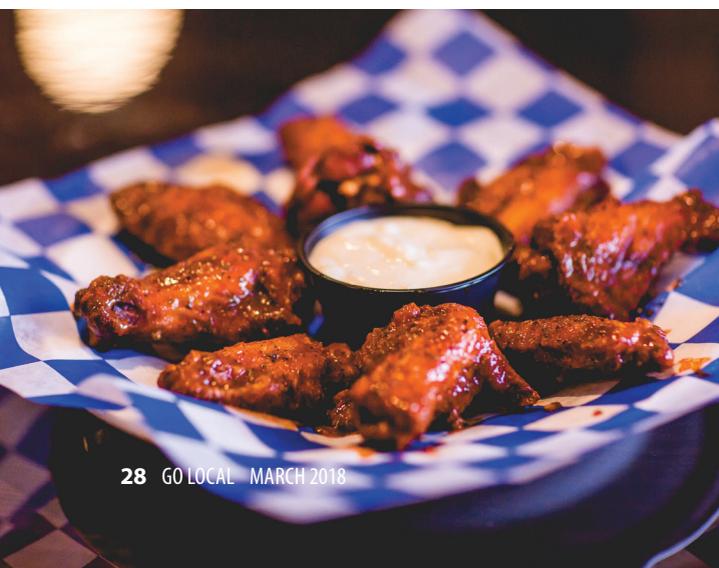
In our November 2016 issue, we did an editorial on Cold Creek Brewery in Ellington, and in it, owner Jamie Boucher is quoted as saying, “Even when we expand I don’t want to move out of here as we’ve hopefully built up a lot of goodwill in town and that will help us move forward.”

State regulations and restrictions on what can (beer) and cannot (liquor and food) be served in a brewery are among the reasons the Bouchers hoped to add to the Cold Creek family of businesses. But mostly, expansion was something their loyal customer base wanted and kept asking for. When the brewery was still going strong past the two-year mark at 6 Industrial Drive, Jamie and his wife Kelly stayed true to their word. They moved forward with the opening of Cold Creek Tavern at 175 West Road (Route 83) in the Meadow View Plaza. This unique eatery brings craft brews, a comforting pub menu, entertainment and that *Go Local* spirit that this area is known for to the slowly-growing Ellington dining scene.

Let’s begin with the beverages. What the Bouchers essentially did is move the tap room out of the brewery (although it is still open afternoons Wednesday - Saturday for take out crowler/growler fills). That move allowed for more production space at the brewery, and for the tavern, which is classified as a restaurant space, to offer a wider variety of food and beverages. First off, the tavern has a full bar, something the brewery couldn’t offer.



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They even carry a few local liquors, such as Connecticut Valley Distillery Smuggler's Rum. There is a focus on local craft beers, including (of course) their own. Four taps of the 12-tap system are dedicated to Cold Creek's ever-changing brews. The other taps, however, flow with craft beers (mostly local or from around New England) in various styles as well as Stafford Cidery hard cider. The bottle selection includes a variety of domestic and imported beers, so yes, one can come in and get a bottle of Bud Light. During Happy Hour, which is from 4-6 p.m., drafts are 20% off and bottles are \$3.00. Loyal customers can participate in the tavern's "Mug Club" - for an annual fee, club members get one free 18-ounce mug a month plus one on their birthday, and also receive discounts on craft beer pours.

Let's talk about the menu next. Kelly enthusiastically says, "A plus to the tavern is we can feature Steve's awesome food here!" "Steve" is Head Chef Steve Daigle, who describes his menu as something different, with a twist or a play on the ordinary. Most notably, beer is a key ingredient in several of the tavern's offerings, specifically their Beer-Brined Wings, Bavarian Pretzels and Beer Cheese, and Beer Sausage Sandwich. There are seven different grilled cheeses (because, as Chef Steve says, "Who doesn't like a good grilled cheese?") including Crab Cake Grilled Cheese, Taco Grilled Cheese, and the signature Buffalo Chicken Grilled Cheese, all of which are served on Texas toast. Mahi Mahi or Firecracker Shrimp Tacos and Pulled Pork on a brioche bun are among the other sandwiches, and there are several burgers on the menu including Spike's Skeleton Key Burger, which is topped with pepper jack cheese, fresh jalapeno, and the house-made Tavern hot sauce which contains Skeleton Key Bone Dust, a local seasoning made in Coventry, as one of its elements. All sandwiches and burgers are served with Deep River (CT) Potato Chips, another local favorite. Rounding out the menu are appetizers, Mac N' Cheese Bowls (with or without Buffalo chicken), salads and side dishes along with specials that are most often made with beef from the neighboring J.T. Farms. The kitchen is open until midnight Sunday-Thursday and 1 a.m. Friday-Saturday, making it a perfect late-night spot.

Let's focus on another thing that makes Cold Creek Tavern stand out – games and entertainment. On Tuesday nights, “DJ Chef Steve” (Daigle) leaves the kitchen to bring trivia to the tavern. He projects questions on the many televisions located throughout the space and players use their electronic devices (think iPhones, iPads) to access an app and answer the questions. He incorporates music videos for fun and makes it fast-paced and entertaining for all involved. USB outlets on the bar and free WiFi ensure that players’ devices will last the night. On Wednesdays, there’s Music Video Bingo with Klonk from local radio station 102.9 The Whale. Players are shown about 30 seconds of a music video which they then must identify on their bingo cards. Themed rounds such as “Our Chefs’ Favorites” and “Break-Up Songs” add to the amusement. During these game nights, the bar runs Happy Hour pricing on beer. Tavern dishwasher James Heath-Ringrose and local Matt Beckius both play the occasional acoustic guitar night for entertainment too. Says Kelly, “We’re trying to make this be a place where people want to spend time.”

Finally, let's talk about community. Ellington is a small town where the sense of community is strong. The Bouchers have done an amazing job incorporating that sense into their tavern, perhaps because they live here, too. Kelly humbly states, “We’ve made an effort to feature some of the businesses in our community.” This is clear in the tavern’s offering and use of several local products like Skeleton Key seasonings, J.T. Farms beef, Stafford Cidery cider, and Deep River potato chips. That local feeling is also echoed on the tavern’s walls which feature photographs of people and places from Ellington’s past. Kelly credits the town’s Historical Society for helping her find these. She says, “The town’s been very supportive – the First Selectman, the Ellington Historical Society, the Planning and Zoning Committee, and the built-in base of people who like our beer.”

Cold Creek Tavern is open Sunday – Thursday from 11 a.m. – 1 a.m. (kitchen closes at midnight) and Friday – Saturday from 11 a.m. – 2 a.m. (kitchen closes at 1 a.m.). You can find out more about them on their Facebook page.

