

Menu offers chances for bon appetit !

Oregon fans will find much more than 'classic arena fare'

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The "courts" in the new **Matthew Knight Arena** are not limited to its game and practice basketball floors. There's also what amounts to a full-fledged food court, where hungry fans can order sandwiches — from turkey, ham and chicken to salmon, pulled pork and beef brisket — as well as burgers, nachos, wings and even a Yakisoba bowl.

Then there are the specialty beverages and treats. The 12 stations that make up the food stops scattered throughout Matthew Knight Arena include a coffee shop for lattes and espressos, an ice cream parlor for frozen treats and even a Voodoo Doughnut stand.

It's time to face facts: Beloved as McArthur Court has been, when it comes to culinary offerings, there's no comparison between old and new, except for some of the pricing. Despite the fancy-schmancy new digs, all of the "classic arena fare" available at the old Mac Court will cost the same at the new place. A hot dog still will be \$4.50; a sausage dog, \$5.50; popcorn and pretzel, \$4; caramel corn, peanuts and ice cream bar, \$4. Even the cost of candy, pizza, nachos, chocolate chip cookies and thirst quenchers is not going up. The more elaborate new entrees will be in the \$8.50 range.

Eric Brandt, director of food and hospitality services, said planning for the menus at the new arena took a long time and incorporates three elements: tradition, the UO "brand" and innovation. "Those were the three things that rose to the surface when we first started talking about the new facility," Brandt said. "Bringing the menu from the old Mac Court is one of the traditional things we've done, but once you get past the smell of the popcorn when you walk in the front (hallway), most of the rest is new."

There are other references to the past, Brandt acknowledges, including naming one of the food stations The Admiral — the one that features Buzzer Beater Bratwurst sautéed in butter and beer, the Wild Pacific Salmon Sandwich and the Chicken Yakisoba — after John Dick, who played on the UO basketball team known as the "Tall Firs," coached in the late 1930s by Howard Hobson. The team won the inaugural NCAA national championship in 1939 with a 46-33 victory over Ohio State, with Dick leading all scorers with 15 points. Dick, who turns 92 this year, later became an aviator with the U.S. Navy, served in World War II and retired as a rear admiral in 1973.

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UO benefactor Phil Knight also has a food station named for him. Uncle Phil's will feature The Mighty Duck, a 7-pound, foot-long, Black Angus beef hot dog; chicken strips with secret sauce, and pepperoni pizza by-the-slice. Likewise, the Daisy Ducks, a women's booster group started in 1972, also has a food court location. Daisy's Diner will dish up the Hardwood Hamburgers and Cheeseburgers, seasoned curly fries and Three-Point Nachos made with shredded beef, cheese, salsa, jalapeño peppers and sour cream.

The new menu selections are part of the "branding" plan for the new arena, Brandt said. "We started the concept at Autzen Stadium, and we're continuing it here. We've developed a food experience that complements the competition and excitement that goes on with the athletics, but it also stands on its own," he said. "Both the food and the quality of service are part of what it means to be the University of Oregon."

Part of that effort is to serve as much Oregon-created food as possible, Brandt said, such as barbecue sauce flavored with Oregon's famous marionberries, locally popped caramel corn from Springfield and red-hot sausages from Cave Junction. And that's where branding starts to meld with innovation

"We're going to have a 'guest chef special' at every event," Brandt said. "We decided we need to have something special available regardless of how much of the arena we are using, whether it's 12,500 people at a basketball game or 1,000 people at a small event. So we'll have something on the menu for two weeks at a time, and it will be available regardless of how many of the food stations we have open."

For example, "a silly idea might be to have 'food on a stick' theme," he said. "It could be shish kebab, cheesecake on a stick — any number of things. The guest chef special could be an entree, a dessert, or even a salad, because salads are not on the permanent menu at Matt Court." His office is open to ideas for guest chef specials. "If we get a lot of requests for something, we'll try to do it here," he said. The main constraint with all of the food is portability.

"One of the most important tests is, can you walk away with it without spilling, return to your seat in the stands and balance it once you get there," Brandt said. "Most of our menu items use a paper 'boat' with a liner. Some things, like hot dogs, come in a foil bag. We have to be able to package things in order for people to be able to handle them easily."

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Some of the food stations have their own kitchens where food can be prepared or finished, while others will get their wares brought up via service elevators from a gigantic kitchen on the arena's lowest level. The white-and-stainless steel galley has ovens, smokers, burners, griddles and fryers, as well as an industrial walk-in freezer. The kitchen is accessible from a parking bay in the underground lot.

Like concessions at Mac Court and Autzen Stadium, volunteer nonprofit groups will be doing the assembling and serving. At Mac Court, that took 60 volunteers. At the stadium, it takes 1,100 from 35 nonprofit groups. At Matthew Knight Arena, the food stations, including all 12 concession stands, will be staffed by more than 180 volunteers.

There are a couple of cafés that the average fan will never see because they are reserved for the bigger and biggest donors and officials. The McArthur Club will seat 1,200 people and feature the full menu from all of the food stations, plus beer, wine and complimentary popcorn.

The even more exclusive Founders Club, located adjacent to private rooms belonging to mega-donors such as Knight and Pat Kilkenny, as well as UO President Richard Lariviere, will have a varied menu "of catered-style food — but there also will be hot dogs available every night," Brandt said. "From my perspective, this facility is so complete and elaborate, there's nothing we can't do that we want to do."

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— ERIC BRANDT, UO DIRECTOR OF FOOD AND HOSPITALITY SERVICES

