

Macaroni Grill serves northern Italian cuisine

By JODY MA
CONTRIBUTING REVIEWER

Sometimes I desire pasta with more spunk than the red sauce that the Pit offers. When this urge strikes, I know exactly where to go: Romano's Macaroni Grill.

The Mac Grill, as my gal pals and I have affectionately termed the restaurant, is utterly delightful. Upon entering the, we were greeted with soft lights draped across the walls, delectable aromas drifting out of the kitchen, and the incredibly frenetic pace at which the waiters operate.

After a long and tortuous wait, albeit entertaining with the complimentary Mac Grill beeper/buzzer, we were finally seated. My ravenous friends and I were informed that if we had called earlier and notified them of our impending arrival (since reservations are not accepted), we might have shortened our wait time.

When we took our seats, we were swiftly greeted by our server, Jeff. He was what could be termed an extremely enthusiastic young lad. He wrote his name with a flourish on our paper-covered table, gave us our crayons, took our order and swept away. We seized the crayons and proceeded to scribble on our table with reckless abandon. The Mac Grill certainly allows its patrons to vent all of their artistic frustrations while eating fresh-baked, complimentary bread.



Jeff returned with our appetizer, the Bella Napoli, a yummy nacho creation. We scarfed the entire dish within minutes, no small feat for so big an appetizer. Without taking a breath, we moved on to our salads. Beware that when ordering a

salad, if the description does not specifically mention lettuce or other such greens, then you really won't get any greens. This was a minor setback, but we quickly recovered. I highly recommend ordering a house salad with your entree; both the Caesar and the Balsamic Vinaigrette sides rocked my world.

Amazingly, we were able to eat more. My friend raved about the Farfalle con Pollo al Sugo Bianco, stating that it was "the best meal I have ever had in my entire life". Quite a statement for grilled chicken and bowtie pasta in cream asiago sauce. I decided on the Pasta Gamberetti e Pinoli, a sizable portion of deliciously creamy pasta and shrimp with a heck of a lot of garlic. My entire troupe gave kudos to the kitchen staff for preparing such a satisfying meal.

We ended our meal with a generous portion of utterly sinful Tiramisu. Other desserts were just as tempting but

nothing compared to the light and just barely sweet qualities of the Tiramisu.

We washed our meal down with copious amounts of alcohol. House wine, whether red or white, is served on the honor system (something students are surely familiar with). For the more indulgent, there is the Bellini, an extremely potent alcoholic concoction. For those underage, soft drinks and iced tea (free refills!) are available.

Mac Grill's menu is rather expansive. Veal, lamb, chicken, seafood, pizza and vegetables are abundant. The meal can get pricey (my meal came to \$20) but it is certainly worth the extra bucks.

Dining at the Mac Grill is like having a taste of northern Italy in your own backyard. So step outside and get a good whiff of the good life. Mac Grill is on Hanes Mall Boulevard, near Stratford Road, just in front of Barnes and Noble.

Taking the plunge

We sent Editorials Editor Andy Ferguson skydiving earlier this month. He survived to give this report of "the longest and most exhilarating seconds known to humankind."



These photographs are taken from a video shot by skydiver Jack Sneed as Andy Ferguson made his descent. Clockwise from left, Ferguson and instructor Chris Wagner are in free-fall seconds after jumping out of the plane; Ferguson is shown close up while in free fall; Wagner has opened the small drag chute at the beginning of the fall; and Ferguson and Wagner make their slow, five-minute descent to the ground with the big parachute after the quick 55-second drop from the airplane.

Photos courtesy of Andy Ferguson

Sizing up Mount Mitchell

By BEN SMITH
OUTDOORS COLUMNIST

In the 19th century, Elisha Mitchell, a professor of science at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, was at the center of a controversy which captured the attention of all North Carolinians. Measuring the atmospheric pressure at the top of several peaks along the Black Mountains of North Carolina, he concluded that the peak now called Mount Mitchell was the tallest peak in eastern North America. In 1855, Dr. Mitchell was challenged by a North Carolina congressman, Thomas Clingman, who claimed to have discovered a yet taller peak.

To verify his original claims, Dr. Mitchell, now rather old and portly, attempted to once again climb Mount Mitchell. He was unsuccessful, however; his body was found at the bottom of a 50-foot waterfall on Mount Mitchell's side.

Almost 150 years later, the university hiking club will attest that Mount Mitchell is nearly as forbidding as it was so long ago. This is not to say, however, that Mount Mitchell (at 6,684 feet, the tallest peak in eastern North America) has not been disturbed by man's activities. Now-

Hiking through the narrow corridor of trees and cloud had made us forget that we were standing upon the shoulders of the tallest peaks of the East.

days, Mitchell could drive up the Blue Ridge Parkway to within a couple hundred yards of his summit. And he would be astounded at the vast numbers of red spruce and Fraser fir which are now painted a sickly, matchstick white, dying because of the effects of rain 1,000 times as acidic as average rain.

The Black Mountains, however, retain their essential wild character. They retain, as our group discovered, the stark weather which impeded Mitchell's climb. They are the most rugged remnants of a mountain range once 15,000 feet tall; they are the still-proud, stony legacy of giants.

Our group experienced the stark majesty of these mountains on the Black Mountain Crest Trail. The trail extends for 12 miles from the parking lot in Mount Mitchell State Park to the small town of Bowdens Creek, and it mostly stays above 6,000 feet. The entire route has the smell of a Christmas tree lot, with the numerous, young red spruce and Fraser fir advertising the upcoming season more pleasingly than their commercial counterparts.

The route, after leaving the parking lot, quickly begins on its first climb to Mount Craig, named after Governor Locke Craig, an early North Carolina conservationist. This particular peak has no trees on its uppermost reaches; its rocky pinnacle is somewhat similar to those found only out west. As we reached the hiked across the summit, we first intimations of the weather which was to come. The wind on the top of the peak had the high, unyielding pitch of a whistle gone mad.

The next few hours were spent hiking in a continuous drizzle punctuated by strong winds which only the scraggly, 10-foot-tall spruces buffeted. We crossed the peaks of Big Tom. See Mitchell, Page B7

Skydiving: More than an airborne roller coaster

By ANDY FERGUSON
EDITORIALS EDITOR

There is an old saying among skydivers that they are the only people who know why the birds sing. With the help of Carolina Sky Sports, I pursued what has been a life-long curiosity Oct. 5 and found out why they say this myself.

Junior Dave Frisvold, a good friend of mine and overall man of the earth, had a desire that equaled mine, so together, we set out for an adventure of unmatched proportions.

We had a 2 p.m. appointment, so our day

Skydiving is not about challenging death, but having a good time.

started out with a two-hour drive to Louisburg, a rural city east of Raleigh whose population doubled with our entrance. I would say that the hardest part of the day for both of us was the drive over, because there was basically two hours of contemplation, expectation and unfettered excitement.

After signing in, we watched a training video that lasted only 15 minutes. The training was simple because we were to make a tandem jump, which means that an instructor is attached to your suit who is responsible for doing everything important, like pulling the ripcord.

Tandem jumping is a relatively new form of jumping that allows a novice skydiver to experience the thrills of skydiving without having to fret over the intricacies.

If you jump several more times, you start to assume more responsibilities, and by the sixth jump, you are actually doing everything solo. This does, however, include an extended training session and some practice.

After the class, Dave and I had about two

hours of watching and waiting. For those who are going to try skydiving, go early. It is worth getting up at 8 a.m. because the appointments start to get backed up later in the day, and it is a slow wait.

Finally, at 5:30 p.m., it was time to go. Even after a slow afternoon, the minute we were told to suit up, everything changed. The blood started pumping and all senses were peaked. I met my videographer, Jack Sneed, who was going to record every sensation and reaction that I would have.

I then met my air instructor, Chris Wagner. Wagner has had well over 1,000 jumps in his 23 years of skydiving and has been a tandem instructor for five years. This was going to be a cinch.

Once we suited up and all straps were secured, it was time to board the plane. Wagner and I were the last of the seven groups to board because we were going to be jumping first. I know that it sounds like I am oozing with machismo right now, but I assure you that is not the case. We did not go first because I had the most chest hair, but because I was getting videotaped.

So there we were, 13,500 feet above the earth. Now the only thing left to do was hurl my body toward it. To be honest, the fear factor at this moment was relatively minimal. Wagner was equipped with two primary ripcords, two backups, a tertiary cord and a computer device that measures altitude. If we still hadn't pulled the chute at 2,000 feet, the device would have automatically released it.

Anyway, skydiving is not about challenging death, but having a good time, particularly a life in flight. In 13 years, the only injuries that Carolina Sky Sports has experienced have been minor, such as a sprained ankle.

With our headgear on, goggles secure and straps fastened tightly, we shimmed on our knees to the plane door. Sneed was slightly in front of us, negotiating his footing with one on the wing and one at the door opening. My view

was straight down — incredible.

Wagner tapped me on the shoulder, which meant it was time to jump. We rocked back and then lunged forward into a blue sea of nothingness. I had told Wagner that I wanted to do some flips coming out of the plane, so instead of spreading out, we tucked and let momentum carry us head over heels three times.

After these five seconds passed, Wagner tapped me again and we straightened out in a swan like position. Our arms were out to our sides and our legs were bent up. When you are falling at speeds varying between 100 and 120 miles per hour, communication is limited to nonverbal forms.

Once we straightened, we did some minor aerial tricks, rotating in a circle to our right and then doing the same to our left, simply by shifting our hips in that respective direction. Sneed flew by and got a close-up of Wagner and me in our free-fall. He then released his chute and watched from above as we continued our descent into the clouds.

Just as we entered the clouds, after 55 of the longest and most exhilarating seconds known to humankind, Wagner released our chute. As the chute unfolded and we burst through the clouds, we had a breathtaking view of the landscape, from 6,000 feet.

For the next five minutes, we floated around, taking in the views. It's funny, because going into the jump I had consciously thought about how many times Wagner must have heard people blathering about the jump and how exciting it was. I am sure this gets tiresome, so I wanted to try not to do it.

After the fact, though, I didn't care. I was euphoric and Wagner was going to listen.

The descent was pleasant, but it really was secondary to the free fall. It was a feeling that is unlike anything I have ever done. It is not like a rollercoaster ride, where you lose your stomach. It is falling and spinning and adrenaline. As Dave said, "It was nutty." Any defi-

nition of the free fall fails to do justice to this sensation.

As we landed, my feet slid into the grass and the experience was over. There was no screaming or outlandish celebration, the glide down had quelled all of that. All that was left was a toothy grin and a feeling of utter complacency.

Dave went on the plane after me and in 25 minutes, he floated back to earth and we compared notes. Nutty. As we walked back to the equipment room, I looked up to sky and reminisced. Why do the birds sing? You'll have to answer that for yourself.

Take to the air

Here are some skydiving services in North Carolina. All are group members of the United States Parachute Association.

- Carolina Sky Sports, Louisburg. (919) 496-2224
- Adrenalin Adventures Skydiving, Wallace. (910) 346-3607 (weekdays); (910) 285-9948 (weekends)
- Airanch Skydivers, Fayetteville. (910) 323-0411
- Carolina Skydiving Institute, Climax. (910) 674-9386
- Cunningham Parachute Service Inc., Pinebluff. (910) 844-5171 (weekends)
- Dismal Swamp Skydivers, Greenville. (919) 758-2428
- Raeford Parachute Center, Raeford. (910) 875-3261
- Ripcord Adventures, Rockingham. (910) 895-1509