



Take Off For Elevation 89

If you're looking for a dining experience offering both excellent food and gorgeous table-side views, consider Elevation 89 At The Ocala Airport. Elevation 89 features American Cuisine in a unique atmosphere overlooking the runway and featuring nightly views of spectacular sunsets. The name of the 150-seat restaurant, established in 2021, references the pilot call signal for the Ocala airfield—which is itself based on the airport's elevation at 89 feet above sea level.

Elevation 89 is one of several local eateries owned by long-time partners Chris Wilson, Daren Robinson, Joe St. Pierre, and Ron "Rondo" Fernandez. In addition to Elevation 89, the group owns County Line Smokehouse in Weirsdale along with The Anchor On Sunset Harbor and its neigh-

bor establishment, The Pizza Joint, both of which are located in Summerfield.

But it's Elevation 89 that's become the flagship of the restaurant group. Along with ample parking, reasonable prices and a unique venue, the restaurant also boasts some of Ocala's most eclectic food offerings. In the words of Executive Chef Jeremy Zajac, recently voted Best Chef in Ocala Magazine's Better of the Best, "There's a little bit of everything on the menu which we revise quarterly for variety. From our burger bar to a freshly cut Filet to regional favorites including Philly Cheesesteaks and New England Lobster Rolls, there's an emphasis on authentically prepared goodness for even the most fussy of palates."

Managing Partner, Chris Wilson, adds,

"The key is all of us are food guys. We want it fresh, perfectly seasoned and prepared and of course we want it at a fair price. Chef's job is easy with all four of us continually frequenting the dining room," he says with a wink and a smile.

"I cook food that I like to eat and that I would serve to my family and friends at home," says Zajac, who's worked alongside some of Ocala's best-known Chefs before taking over the kitchen at Elevation 89. "And I like to be creative particularly with our nightly specials including a fresh catch and several dishes that have become signatures at Elevation 89."

And while Zajac is most directly involved in Elevation 89, he's proud of the group's other establishments.

"All the places we've established are places I would go to eat and we serve a broad



Chris Wilson, Chef Jeremy Zajac and Daren Robinson

range of food and drinks in several unique settings. We also have a great staff who take extraordinary pride in customer service."

The partners – Wilson, Robinson, St. Pierre and Fernandez – joined forces in 2015 when they started The Cafe At Jenkins Hyundai, a small eatery still in business today. The business expanded in 2016 to provide food service to the Card Room at Oxford Downs. "We were focused on these niche, amenity type of food service operations until 2017 when the opportunity came along to purchase County Line," Wilson seems to remember it like yesterday. "County Line was really the beginning of our expansion and we were able to transform a sleepy run-down bar with no food service into a thriving bar and restaurant featuring entertainment six nights a week."

The business continued growing until the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. "It was a scary time for everyone in our industry after the shut down but we actually saw it as an opportunity," says Wilson, adding that

they opened three new restaurants within 18 months of COVID. "We were able to purchase well located assets at bargain prices and of course establish a great partnership with the City of Ocala and the Ocala Airport."

One of Elevation 89's biggest fans is Airport Director, Matt Grow, who oversaw the construction of Ocala's new airport terminal and continues to manage its day to day operations. He said most airports similar in size to Ocala have a place to eat but typically cater to pilots and are more canteens than restaurants. Grow wanted the citizens of Ocala to visit the new airport terminal and enjoy it for more than the airplane hanging inside its main terminal and the views of planes landing and taking off. "So how do you invite the community to come out and visit the airport?" He asks and answers his own question. "You serve great food."

ENTER ELEVATION 89.

For Wilson, Robinson, St. Pierre, Fernandez and Zajac, sharing their passion for food with

Elevation 89 At The Ocala Airport
Open Daily 11 AM-9 PM
Elevation89AtTheOcalaAirport.com
(352)655-2880

County Line Smokehouse & Spirits
Open Daily 7 AM-Midnight
CountyLineSmokehouse.com
(352)753-1104

The Anchor On Sunset Harbor
Open Daily 11 AM-Midnight
TheAnchorOnSunsetHarbor.com
(352)510-0219

The Pizza Joint
Open Wednesday-Sunday
Noon-9 PM
(352)510-0320

Ocala and the surrounding community has been a labor of love. And they're not done quite yet. They just expanded the dining room at Elevation 89 and have added a full service catering operation for both in-house and outside catering. And you never know when a new restaurant might come available.

So take off for Elevation 89 and enjoy some delicious food and a great view from your table. Enjoy a custom cocktail, maybe a few laughs. And you never know, you may even be surprised to receive a visit from one of the guys while you're there. **OM**