

FULL OF FLAVOR

Aramark's M Hospitality dining program offers up the best eats and treats the state has to offer.

BY MORGAN HALASKA

MODERN, memorable and Minnesota: Aramark's M Hospitality, the dining program custom fit for U.S. Bank Stadium, is aptly and cleverly named. While Aramark may be the exclusive hospitality partner and dining services provider at U.S. Bank Stadium, the food service company knew that in order to succeed, it had to foster local culinary partnerships. "From the outset, our collective goal was to create a dining environment that represents the award-winning, diverse and distinct tastes of the Twin Cities," says Jamie Hodgson, general manager of Aramark's M Hospitality.

Suffice to say, Dome Dogs aren't on the menu.

For those disappointed, take comfort in the 430 concession points of sale. Aramark certainly did its homework in scouting the region, with help from tastemaker Andrew Zimmern, to fold the best chefs and restaurants into the stadium's offerings. Revival's fried chicken, Ike's monstrous Bloody Mary and Kramarczuk's sausages—there's not only something for every taste, but there's also

something from every figurative corner of the Twin Cities. "From classic concessions to Minnesota-centric fare to high-end catering, our goal is to ensure we create menus that feature something for everyone."

THE CATERING

"We engage in the meeting planning process very early to ensure alignment on meeting goals and discuss how the food and beverage offerings can help planners achieve those goals," says Hodgson. "We're sensitive to special diets, food allergies and dietary restrictions and work with meeting planners to develop alternative menus for those requiring special arrangements."

Each club is specially equipped to handle meals of any type, with a Mongolian grill in Medtronic Club and a wood-fire grill in the Delta Sky360 Club. Fresh and local ingredients are used; the culinary staff has partnered with Minnesota farmers and producers for the best locally sourced ingredients.

SWEETS IN THE SUITES & CLUBS

Not only was local king for Aramark's culinary program, but Aramark looked specifically for woman-owned and minority-owned vendors. "It's important for us to involve local businesses and incorporate their offerings into the menu and offerings," says Hodgson. "We want our operations to reflect the character of the Twin Cities, and it's important for us to include these local-owned businesses that fans, guests and visitors can relate to."

"I always say size matters and it kind of does," says Tina Rexing of her award-winning **T-Rex Cookie**, which comes as "little" as one-half pound or as big as 5 pounds. "They're crunchy on the outside and still chewy in the middle. ... They're known to feed a family of four." Before baking for a living since February 2015, Rexing worked in corporate America for 20 years. Now she makes about 2,000 cookies by hand a week, which can be found in local establishments like the Minneapolis Farmers Market, during intermission at Orchestra Hall and now at U.S. Bank Stadium. Available in the clubs and suites is the tray of 10 half-pound cookies (four chocolate chip, three sea salt caramel chip and three sugar) and orders of the monstrous 5-pound cookie.

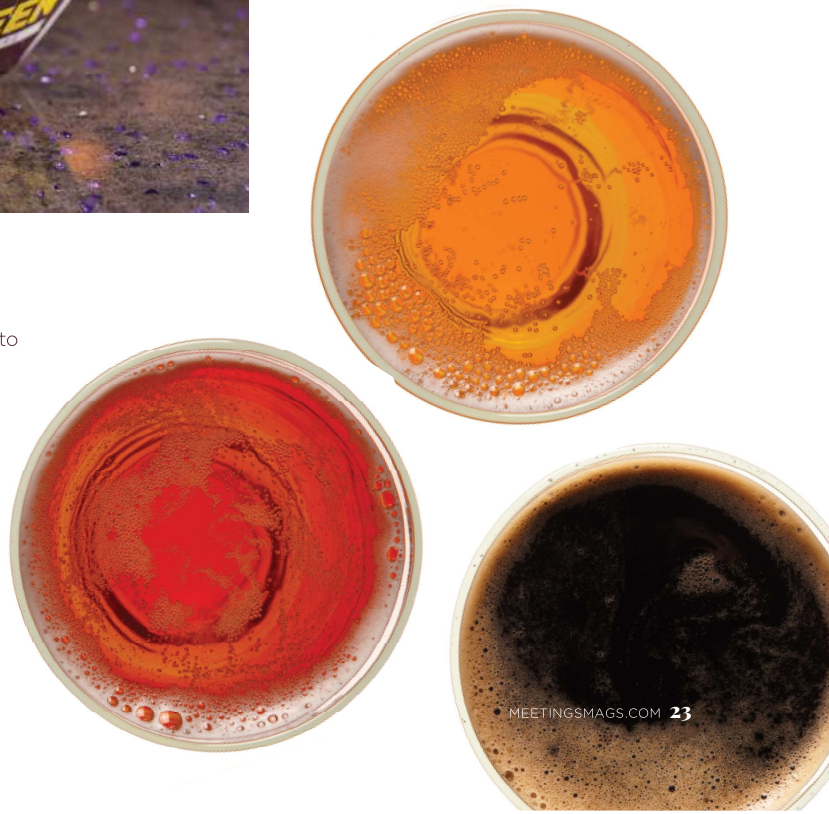
THE PRAIRIE DOG





Crafty Partnership

Aramark's commitment to local flavor has, naturally, extended to beer. In collaboration with the Northeast Brewers and Distillers Association (NEBDA), a rotating selection of microbrews like Fair State Brewing Cooperative, NorthGate Brewing, Insight Brewery, Sociable Cider Werks, Bauhaus Brew Labs and 56 Brewing will be on tap at events. "Northeast Minneapolis has emerged as the epicenter of Minnesota's craft beer movement, and we are incredibly excited to be able to showcase the variety and quality of beer produced by NEBDA member breweries," says Evan Sallee, CEO, Fair State Brewing Cooperative and member of the NEBDA Board of Directors.



WHAT'S ON THE MENU:

Ribbon Cutting Ceremony

For U.S. Bank Stadium's ribbon cutting ceremony on July 22, 2016, guests noshed on a lunch showcasing M Hospitality's catering expertise.

LAVENDER LEMONADE

RAISIN-WALNUT FARM BREAD,
HERBED CIABATTA, SEEDED LAHVOSH,
SWEET CREAM BUTTER

PAN-ROASTED BREAST OF CHICKEN
WITH RED ONION JAM

RED LAKE WILD RICE SALAD WITH
SUNDRIED LOCAL CRANBERRIES, CANDIED
PECANS, FIELD CHIVES

SUMMER LETTUCE BOUQUET WITH
CHAMPAGNE VINAIGRETTE

SALTED CARAMEL CREAM PUFF
CHOCOLATE GANACHE, VANILLA CRÈME,
FRESH BERRIES



Just Truffles has made appearances on *The Oprah Show* and the Food Network, but St. Paul is home base for these truffles, which have been a local delicacy for 28 years. What makes these handmade chocolates so exceptionally good? “We don’t use any wax or preservatives. It’s all fresh, local ingredients. And a little bit of love goes in each one. They’re all made completely by hand,” says Kathleen O’Hehir-Johnson, who makes 1,500 truffles a day. Just Truffles are kosher certified and most flavors are gluten-free. On the clubs and suites menu, though—made just for the stadium—are cannolis dripped in chocolate and filled with caramel or Bailey’s ganache and individual tarts topped with caramel ganache and sprinkled with sea salt.

Thomasina Petrus is first and foremost a singer and an actress—her **Thomasina’s Cashew Brittle** is just something she happened to be good at making, and people demanded she keep at it. Using only the simplest ingredients—not corn syrup or baking soda, which can make brittle hard—Petrus’ melt-in-your-mouth candy is sinfully delicious. Petrus, who calls herself “a total product of this city,” graduated from North High School and has been a union actor for more than 25 years in the Twin Cities. Her cashew brittle has been at the Minnesota State Fair for 10 years, and now her 4.5-ounce bags are being served in clubs, and 1-pound and 2-pound boxes in the suites. “Food is like music and entertainment. It brings people together,” she

PHOTOS: MINNESOTA VIKINGS; TJ TURNER; ARAMARK; RACHEL NADEAU.



says. “Good food creates good memories.”

Popcorn and nuts are a staple in any stadium. But Kiki Louise’s **Bohemian Kettle** sweet and salty snacks won’t be like anything you’ve tasted. Her sumac popcorn is completely unique to Minnesota. “Some people say they don’t know what sumac is, but they know what sumac is because, when you’re driving down the highway, it’s the really beautiful bushes that turn this crimson color in the fall,” says Louise, who used to lick the stems of sumac as a girl scout. “It’s got this tangy lemon flavor. It’s the strangest flavor in the world.” Louise’s uniquely flavored “cheffed-up” popcorn and nuts (peanuts, almonds and cashews) are meant to go well with beers and drinks in the clubs and suites. All of her flavors

of nuts and popcorn come with a quirky title and one-liner that pays homage to her relatives. There’s the smoked sea salt popcorn that “tastes like a campfire” called Ol’ Smokey’s Smoked Popcorn (Always puffing on a stogie, he stunk to high heaven) and MN Hot Dish-flavored popcorn dubbed “Aunt Tillie’s Hot Dish” (She’d wear black, white gloves and pearls to go downtown shopping. What a dish!). “It makes for a conversation starter,” she says. “Maybe people will talk about their goofy family.” ■

Get Connected

BOHEMIAN KETTLE | bohemiankettle.com
JUST TRUFFLES | justtruffles.com

THOMASINA’S CASHEW BRITTLE | thomasinascashewbrittle.com
T-REX COOKIE | trexcookie.com

Q: *What’s one thing about the stadium you think will pleasantly surprise planners and attendees?*

A: *“The food! From Minnesota-theme options like gourmet brats to southern fried chicken with all the accoutrements, the variety of offerings we have is unmatched. Guests and planners are able to choose from their favorite stadium cuisine to gourmet options, customizing menus specific to their event.”*

—TOYYA LASSERE,
guest experience manager