

Offshore Oasis

Ventura's Offshore Café offers NFL games, drinks and mussels on the mainland

By Ray Schweibert

TURNING OFF SHORE (usually featuring the pizza the Ventura family built its reputation on), and different drink specials every day of the week. Half-priced appetizers are offered every Sunday, Monday and Wednesday. There are four 42-inch plasma TVs at a spacious bar, and some smaller screens elsewhere in the 8,000-square-foot building.

"Occasionally we'll have a local radio



Chris Dougherty and Mary Shelton with bartender Rich Crosson.

and Saturday evenings, or Sunday and Monday NFL broadcasts.

"It can get kind of mobbed in here," says manager Jamie Franzoni. "In the off-season it's more local families and people who work in the area year-round, which is the reason we started our loyal-rewards program. We wanted to show our gratitude to those who help us stay busy all year long."

Regular customers are welcome to sign up for e-mailed discounts on purchases at Ventura's, but that's only one incentive to wanting to go there. A 4-6pm happy hour includes a complimentary hot-and-cold buffet spread

station do live broadcasts and have free giveaways and beer specials during games," says assistant manager Tammy Herbut. "That really brings them in, and it's always a nice crowd. I have a two-year-old and I find it a nice place to be able to bring my whole family."

Ventura's is famous for its mussels marinara, gourmet pan pizzas, and Black Angus filet mignon, but its extensive menu also includes poultry, seafood and lighter fare sure to accommodate all tastes.

Lou DiVentura Jr. bought what had been a neighborhood watering hole named The Rugby back in 1995, and



Kathy Kelly, bartender Rich Crosson, Barb McDonald and Ventura's owner Lou DiVentura.

spent two years renovating it before debuting Ventura's Offshore Café. He also owns Ventura's Greenhouse in Margate (next to Lucy the Elephant), which recently celebrated its 20th anniversary, and family members have

and a smaller banquet room closer to the main entrance. Altogether there is seating for about 250. Adjacent to the restaurant and bar is a package-goods store that features an excellent selection of Italian and imported wines, and

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owned Mama Ventura's in Voorhees since the 1960s. One of the Offshore Café bartenders, Rich Crosson, came on board from The Rugby, and another mixologist, Harry "Bump" Powers, started when the Café first opened.

Some of Ventura's Offshore Café's more interesting décor includes a cigar-store Indian in the bar, a replica of a WWI-era pilot (both about five feet tall) next to a vast brick fireplace in the main dining room, and an antique ship's compass in the foyer. The conspicuous red and green sign (perhaps a little less conspicuous during the holidays) facing Shore Road is inlaid with a miniature, moving ship's paddlewheel.

Along with the main dining room, the establishment includes a newly refurbished dining area that is often used for private parties and banquets,

a list informing the less wine savvy of which dishes best go with which wines. Some are high-end, but the bulk of the wine selection is reasonably priced. You can also purchase holiday gift baskets in the package-goods store that include, among other items, jars of Ventura's homemade pasta sauce.

"We used to market the sauce in supermarkets, but now you can only buy it here," says Franzoni. "That way you know it's always freshly jarred." ■

Ventura's Offshore Café is located at 2015 Shore Road in Northfield. It is open daily from 11am-2am. Happy hour is 4-6pm daily and includes a complimentary buffet, which is also offered during all NFL. Ticket broadcasts Sunday and Monday. Drink, appetizer and blackboard specials are offered throughout the week. Call 641-5158 or see www.venturascafe.com.