

Wild Duck Legacy Lives On

Student-athlete ownership revives 27-year-old community cornerstone

BY SAMANTHA SOBEL

After 27 years, Wild Duck Cafe, a campus-area community staple, closed in 2022 due to post-pandemic inflation. But Wild Duck made its elaborate comeback last September under new student-athlete management.

Located across from Matthew Knight Arena and a stone's throw from Hayward Field and Autzen Stadium, the restaurant is a frequent stop for college athletes, coaches, sports teams and fans.

Charles Haasenritter and his wife moved from Hilo, Hawai'i, to Eugene to be closer to their son, Kilohana Haasenritter, a junior and a running back on the Ducks' roster. Kilohana co-owns the restaurant with his parents and handles most of Wild Duck's public relations.

With no prior restaurant experience, the Haasenritters jumped right in. "We were here so much traveling and watching the Oregon Ducks team, that it made sense for us to acquire something here locally and get involved and active in the community while our son is here," Charles Haasenritter says. "It's a unique experience to be an Oregon Duck and an Oregon Duck parent, and we wanted to be close enough to be able to soak in the experiences ourselves and not have it secondhand."

Since reviving the establishment, the menu has evolved, incorporating new Hawaiian dishes and flavors. Haasenritter says, "We have dropped in a little bit of our Hawaiian, Asian American flair."

The versatile menu also features a variety of burgers, pastas, salads and wings, many of which are made from scratch.

Wild Duck makes signature cocktails with its own ginger beer and blueberry-infused vodka made in-house. "The fact that we go the extra mile and have all this homemade stuff, it's kind of an anomaly in today's day and age," Haasenritter says.

With recent inflation and people going out to restaurants less since the pandemic, the Wild Duck has seen its hurdles.

Haasenritter says, "We are the type of people that feel like we can overcome anything when the odds are against us. We can rise up and find the way. So far, we've done enough to stick around, but we definitely have to increase events." So looking forward, Wild Duck wants to start hosting gameday podcasts for sports journalists and work in tandem with the University



HAWAIIAN STYLE PLATE WITH CHICKEN KATSU AND TERIYAKI BEEF. Photo by Eve Weston

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— Charles Haasenritter, Wild Duck Owner

of Oregon to help create a game day atmosphere outside of the arena.

Besides getting to see his son in action, Haasenritter was inspired by the legacy of the Wild Duck and the history behind its previous owners. Bob Jensen opened the cafe in 1996 as Villard Street Pub before moving locations in the early 2000s, making the Wild Duck one of the most beloved restaurants near the University of Oregon campus.

"Bob Jensen had this vision of trying to create a sports bar for Oregon Duck fans," Haasenritter says. "They've had concerts and all types of entertainment. They've done podcasts with athletes and coaches, and they've done events, and that's all of the types of things we're looking to build upon, create and bring back."

The Haasenritters aren't just here for their son; they plan on getting comfy in Eugene.

"We are here for the long term, and it's really about legacy," Haasenritter says. "To someone from Hawai'i, family is every-

thing. How you represent your family is how you show them love. Someone like Marcus Mariota is probably a perfect example of someone coming from Hawai'i to Eugene, Oregon, and doing something significant that leaves a lasting impact for many generations."

The Haasenritters' goal is to leave a lasting legacy, affect the community in a positive way and connect the fans with the athletes who represent the brand they love so much.

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Wild Duck Cafe is open 11 am to 9 pm Monday through Wednesday, 11 am to midnight Thursday through Saturday, and 9 am to 10 pm Sunday, at 1419 Villard Street. 541-866-DUCK, WildDuck.biz, @wildduckcafeofficial on Instagram and Wild Duck Cafe on Facebook.

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