

Oktoberfest

Any Day of the Year

Celebrate German culture all year long at **Hollerbach's Willow Tree Cafe** in historic riverside Sanford.

By Eduardo Montalvo
Photo by John Zawacki, www.jzstudios.com



The butcher shop plate for two features a sample of traditional German food, including bratwurst, knockwurst, "weisswurst," pork chops, pork loaf, German potato salad, sauerkraut and cooked sweet red cabbage—and is complemented by an Aventus, a Bavarian "Eisbock" beer.

Oktoberfest is a 16-day festival starting in late September and running into the early part of October that is well known for the quantity of beer consumed as well as the friendly, social atmosphere of the beer hall. Every year, more than 6 million mugs of beer and half a million sausages are served at this festival in Munich.

In Central Florida, Hollerbach's Willow Tree Cafe in Sanford also offers great

beer, food and entertainment fit for a local Oktoberfest. Willow Tree Cafe, located at 205 East First St., is both a German tavern and a restaurant that offers a wide selection of Bavarian beer with more than 50 varieties in bottles and five on tap. There are also 30 different kinds of German Schnapps, or fruit brandy, with high alcohol content (40 percent).

Theo Hollerbach, Willow Tree's owner, is often at the restaurant chatting

with customers with a mug in hand. Like Hollerbach, the restaurant is full of life, with busy waiters carrying beer and enormous plates loaded with food. The bar area, which resembles an authentic German tavern, is warm and cozy, and on occasion musicians play traditional German folk songs for diners, which adds to the festiveness of the place.

A good starter is "Aufschnitt" (cold cuts) at \$15.29. Its size and variety will

exceed your expectations: an abundant selection of cold cuts of meats, creamy cheeses, breads and garnishes as well as Liverwurst (pâté), mini-pickles and egg salad.

To eat all these German delicacies, you must have beer to wash it down. Aventus is an "Eisbock" beer, a traditional Bavarian beer from the Kulmbach region that is made by freeze distilling a "doppelbock" (dark, sweet, malty specialty beer with high alcohol content between 6 percent and 10 percent) and removing the ice to concentrate the flavor and alcohol. It has strong notes of caramel, banana, clove and even some prune and raisin and a rich buttery smoothness.

The most expensive item on the dinner menu, "Schlachthaus Platte Für Zwei" (butcher shop plate for two at \$25.99) is actually very reasonable considering the amount of food, with more than enough for more than two people. The huge platter is a sampler of the most traditional German food, featuring a trio of sausages: bratwurst, a mild seasoned pork sausage, knockwurst, a beefy, thick sausage and "weisswurst," a mild sausage made out of pork and veal. The plate also has pork chops and pork loaf and might be overwhelming without the balancing force of German potato salad, sauerkraut and cooked sweet red cabbage. Overall, the plate is so delicious that, despite its size, you will want to finish it off.

But not everything is meaty and oversized at The Willow Tree; there are plenty of offerings between \$7 and \$16 with fresh salads, sandwiches and schnitzels. Willow Tree's Chicken Salad at \$7.99, for example, perfectly blends sweet and savory for a great lunch or dinner. Shredded chicken breast with apples, pecans, celery and mayonnaise served on a buttery croissant—"köstlich" (delicious).

Another great choice is "Himmel und Erde" (Heaven and Earth) at \$12.50, which combines earthy potatoes, enhanced with heavenly apples, onions and smoked bacon, accompanied by tender smoked pork loin and sauerkraut. Whether you are German or not, you'll enjoy Hollerbach's Willow Tree Cafe to celebrate any day of the year with authentic German beer, food and music. ■