

## Denise Joy, The Spirited Gourmet Manager

**“It’s not work if you’re passionate about what you do.”**

Sometimes, the perfect job for someone seems to just fall into their laps, as if by magic.

That seemed to be the case with Denise Joy, who manages The Spirited Gourmet, the wine and high-end foodstuffs shop just inside the door of the Oakridge Clubhouse. Kevin Walters, the Director of Club Operations, approached her with the idea in 2020 and the store opened in November of that year.

“When Kevin asked if I was interested in doing this, I was like, oh my God, this is my dream job!” she says. “I didn’t even stop to think about it. I said absolutely I want to do that. Now, I love my job with every fiber of my being!”



Although the job seemed to come out of the blue, in many ways Joy had been preparing for it her entire career. She graduated from Armstrong State University with a degree in business, working as a server, a hostess, and a bartender while in school. She was in the hospitality industry for 20 years in Orlando, Florida, including serving as director of food and beverage at three hotels there and also at the Sanderling Hotel in Duck, N.C. Along the way she began studying wine and earned two sommelier certifications.

Ten years ago, she needed to return to Savannah to take care of her ailing father and was hired as a consultant to assist the Oakridge clubhouse manager. After that, she helped establish standards of excellence for servers, hostesses, bartenders, and managers. She became manager of the Palmetto Clubhouse in 2013 and then transitioned into a club events coordinator role for all the clubs in 2016. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, it necessitated creativity in figuring out how to continue serving members. The Club began offering its pop-up meals and selling wine by the bottle to a strong response.

That led to the decision to create the Spirited Gourmet, which is now open 11 to 6, Thursday through Monday. In addition to managing the store, Joy works with chefs to put on wine dinners. Joy chooses wines to go with each course and shares with diners information about the region, the grower, the grape, the wine’s characteristics, and what foods go well with it. Members can order the featured wines.

“What I love about my job is when members ask me to help them choose wines. I say to them, ‘Tell me my parameters, what’s your budget, what are you looking for?’ and I know exactly where to direct them.”

The store has a good selection of wines from a variety of countries—including Spain, France, Greece, and Italy as well as the U.S. She also seeks out suppliers for specific wines that members request. She recalls one instance in which a gentleman told her about a wine he and his wife had enjoyed on their honeymoon in Switzerland. It took a while, she says, “but he was over the moon when I found it for him.”

She sells five to eight cases of reasonably-priced Landings Club wines each week. Next most popular are wines from California and Oregon, followed by wines from Italy. She also knows the wine preferences of certain customers. “I know exactly what they like, and I order with them in mind, and I tell them, ‘Hey, I just got this in.’”

“People say, ‘Oh, you know everything about wine,’ but I only scratch the surface. It’s continued education for me and that’s what’s so good about this. It’s not work if you’re passionate about what you do.”

*By Rick Colvin, a member whose career as a journalist included 12 years with the Los Angeles Times.*