



Leslie Wilson, the owner of The Bacon Tree restaurant, prepares food recently. The Winterport restaurant is a popular destination.

Home cooking takes center stage

The Bacon Tree in Winterport settles into its new location

BY SHELBY HARTIN
BDN STAFF

WINTERPORT — From the hollandaise on any one of The Bacon Tree’s eggs Benedict choices to the sauerkraut atop the River’s Edge Reuben on the lunch menu and toast made with homemade bread that comes with an omelet, Leslie Wilson puts a strong focus on homemade food in the Winterport restaurant.

Watch the video
bangordailynews.com

Now that The Bacon Tree has settled into its new location at 279 South Main St., where it reopened June 1, there’s more opportunity than ever before to try the hand-crafted fare. Open for breakfast, lunch and dinner from Wednesday through Saturday and for breakfast on Sunday, The Bacon Tree’s menu and food purview has expanded to include lunch selections and a revolving dinner menu that changes each week.

“We try to make everything in house here. Right now we’re not there yet, but we eventually we want to be making our own mayonnaise, our own ketchup,” Wilson said. “Right now we make all the breads, the muffins. The corned beef hash is made here. The sausage gravy is made here. The hollandaise is made here.”

Wilson takes care of the duties as head chef while her husband, David Wilson, helps out with the baking, making everything from the breads and dinner rolls to the muffins, biscuits, pies and scones. What



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Order up at The Bacon Tree restaurant in Winterport.

some may not know is that neither of them is professionally trained.

“I’m not a professionally trained chef,” Leslie Wilson said. “I was trained by my family and different restaurants I’ve worked at. I’ve been doing this since I was 8 years old. It’s different than having culinary training, which I’m trying to beat out of the chefs we have right now. My style of cooking is made from scratch — home-made, like you’re coming to my house.”

And it’s Leslie Wilson’s style of cooking — particularly showcased through reservation-only Friday night dinners The Bacon Tree held at its old location down the street — that has garnered the restaurant “a cult following,” she says.

“We did a different menu every Friday night. We did a homemade pasta, a meat choice of some sort, seafood and a vegetarian choice, along with a couple of appetizers and a couple desserts. But it literally changed every week, so our customers that

became our following, they knew they would get something different every time, and they loved that,” Leslie Wilson said.

At the new location, dinners on Friday nights will remain reservation only. But from Wednesday through Thursday and on Saturday, dinner at The Bacon Tree will be offered and patrons can expect new offerings each week.

A recent dinner menu featured bruschetta haddock, a haddock filet topped with housemade pesto, tomato and Parmesan served with rice and a choice of a garden or Caesar salad, as well as chicken cordon bleu, bacon-wrapped meatloaf and grilled swordfish. Other dishes included lobster-scallop risotto, a dish with freshly shucked Maine lobster; baked-stuffed shrimp; and David’s homemade lobster mac and cheese.

There’s no guarantee those entrees will show up again in the coming weeks, however. Dinner can be a new and exciting surprise every week for patrons.

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South Portland’s Griffin Club rages on

BY KATHLEEN PIERCE
BDN STAFF

SOUTH PORTLAND — Ted Williams drank here. Dave Cowens, Jim Rice and Luis Tiant did, too. The walls, painted Celtic green and covered in wood paneling, hold photos of a host of Boston sports greats that made their way to the Griffin Club in the last half century.

Dining on lobster and swilling beer here, their memories saturate every nook and inch of this community tavern.

“Everyone but Larry Bird came in here,” said Scott Parker, the owner of this well-loved, well-worn South Portland pub that celebrates its namesake founder, Eddie Griffin, on June 25 with an all-day party.

“Everybody wanted to hang out with the guy,” said Parker of the kind-hearted sports promoter and local legend Griffin, who passed away in 1993 from cancer. “Even nowadays I get hundreds of people who come in and say, ‘Oh yeah, Eddie Griffin and I were best friends.’”

The bar owner and communi-

tarian opened The Dug Out, another now-shuttered Knightville watering hole, 50 years ago. Three years later, he opened the Griffin Club a block west on Ocean Street.

“As a South Portland bar owner, he would’ve been [celebrating] 50 [years of business] this year,” said Parker, who is celebrating his large legacy.

“He was a great man that would give to charity. He liked sports. But if you lost, we wasn’t too happy about that. He liked the winning team,” said Parker. “The bar was just Eddie.”

Anyone who called got a donation. Volunteer fire departments still call.

“There are so many plaques I don’t have enough room for them,” said Parker, a South Portland native, who remembers going into the Boston Garden on a Griffin-backed trip, meeting the Celtics Dream Team and stopping at Burger King when he was 10. “We grew up poor, and Eddie would always make sure we stopped for burgers.”

He ran sports leagues, brought players to Portland and held court



KATHLEEN PIERCE | BDN

Owner Scott Parker outside Griffin Club. The sports bar celebrates Eddie Griffin’s life on Saturday.

in the Irish pub, marked with photos of the thatched roof village he hailed from.

Back then it was “a man’s bar,” said Parker. “Ladies were served at tables in the back and men stood. There were no stools.”

If a fight broke out, Griffin, who excelled in boxing and basketball, would keep the peace by

sending the duelers into the basement’s boxing ring.

“Knock it off and put on the gloves,” he would bark.

From the creaky floors to family photos embedded in the bar to the relaxed clubhouse vibe, not much has changed. You can plunk down \$2 for a pint, cry on some-

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Harvest coming to farmers markets

The Orono Farmers’ Market was loaded with greens last Saturday. Bags stuffed full with diminutive leaves of baby Swiss chard and beet greens. Big heads of lettuce — some curly, some smoother. Bunches of firm kale leaves in different varieties. And lots of radishes in a spectrum of hues.

The stalls loaded with greens are a sign that the lush variety of summer produce isn’t far behind. I picked up some baby beets with the greens attached and took them home to saute with spring onions, garlic and carrots for a lunchtime side dish that day. It needed only a sprinkle of salt and pepper, and it was perfect — fresh and bold.

I love when the summer harvest comes to the farmers market. Every week is a little different, and I wait until I see what’s there to decide what we’ll eat for the week. It’s in-season eating at its best.

At Orono on Saturday, I picked up spinach, lettuce, baby greens and a few varieties of radishes. I also bought some carrots that went into the sauteed beet dish and into the curry dish I am sharing with this week’s column.

Are you a fan of curries? I am. From the coconut milk-laced Thai curries to flavorful Indian curries, I adore the bold, nuanced flavors of them.

This vegetarian main dish is an Indian curry, in which the blend of spices mix with lentils, rice and lots of veggies — carrots, onions and peas. Finished off with some fresh cilantro, it’s warm and filling. The seasonings in this include ginger and garlic, along with dried spices — cumin and garam masala, a spice blend.

Look for garam masala in the spice section of the grocery store. McCormick makes a version. So does Simply Organic and Frontier. If it’s not there, check out the ethnic section. Also, I am reasonably certain you can find it at the Natural Living Center in Bangor, Whole Foods and Trader Joes in Portland. You can also order it on-

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Dijon chicken for a crowd

Chicken is such easy-going stuff, amenable to all kinds of flavors and manner of preparation, whether stove top, oven or grill. Most modern people don’t have to catch chickens, murder, pluck and eviscerate them. Besides all that, we can buy vast quantities of all our favorite parts: breasts, thighs, legs or wings. There seems to be no end to chicken recipes.

My friend Bonnie Hughes gave me this recipe, which she got from her sister, Barbara. It is a good way to handle boneless, skinless breasts — which, frankly, are always a little at risk of being flavorless. With a dose of Dijon mustard and a dash of cayenne, it produces a handy pan full of chicken for as many as eight to 10 folks for a party or potluck. Divide the recipe, and you have the right amount for a family supper. No one says you can’t use the sauce on a cut-up chicken or all thighs.

Bonnie cautioned against using low-fat or nonfat yogurt. If you lack whole-milk yogurt, you can improve the situation by draining the low-fat stuff in a sieve for an hour and letting it thicken — a good way to produce a reasonable facsimile of Greek-style yogurt, too.

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