



Farmers market cafe pops up in Topsham

Brunswick chef sources menu from winter vendors

BY KATHLEEN PIERCE
BDN STAFF

TOPSHAM — Forget the glam restaurants of Portland. Find the hottest farm-to-table feast this season 27 miles north, in an old fairground.

Last week the Midcoast Market Cafe opened at a bare-bones concession stand in the heart of Topsham Fairgrounds. On Fridays when the winter farmers market is in session, Brunswick-based chef Jenn Legnini stirs up a new con-

cept, along with Tuscan kale and white bean soup.

“I’m only sourcing from vendors who are here,” said Legnini, spreading apple and parsnip butter on slices of bread from King & I Angus, sold amid an array of baked goods a few steps away.

Bringing a fresh vibe to local produce, her chalkboard specials feature herb-roasted mushroom and braised chard panini with local tomme cheese and a maple roasted turkey breast with carrots and daikon

slaw. Plus a soup made with ingredients fresh from the farmer’s wheelbarrow into her stockpot.

“I think it’s a heck of an idea,” said Dick Piper, owner of Piper Ranch in Buckfield, taking a break from selling grassfed highland beef to peruse the menu. “I don’t have to worry about what I’m going to eat.”

Every week Legnini will transform the kitchen in the exhibition hall, where hot dogs, burgers and bean suppers are typically pre-

pared, into a four-hour gourmet popup. She treks in panini grills, a soup pot and a cooler of garnishes, braised and roasted veggies, cheese and meat sourced days earlier from market vendors. The trained chef, who worked at Portland’s Five Fifty-Five, and apprenticed on a Freeport farm, allows shoppers to experience the harvest with a hearty lunch.

“There is so much available,” said Legnini, who “dreams in flavors.”

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KATHLEEN PIERCE | BDN

A farm-fresh lunch of herb-roasted mushrooms and braised chard panini with local tomme cheese and homemade apple and parsnip butter is the latest addition to the Midcoast Market Cafe at the Topsham Fairgrounds.

Are reviews still relevant?

In the kitchen, it takes trial and error to get from a recipe idea to the recipe you read each week in this column. There are times when recipes just don’t work out, and I have to start over once, twice, as many times as it takes. Other times, recipes come together faster because I use techniques that I’ve learned over the years of creating recipes to make something new and different.



SARAH WALKER CARON

These wontons fall into the latter category. Baked wontons are something I began working on — and perfected — a few years ago because, while I like the crispiness of fried wontons, I hate the actual frying of them. For this version of my recipe, I paired cabbage and chicken with a Thai-inspired peanut sauce for a hearty filling and dipping sauce. They’re crispy on the outside, flavorful on the inside and are pretty easy to make.

When I am creating recipes, I rely on the honest opinions of whoever is tasting them to help me go from good to great — whether it’s my kids, friends, coworkers or family.

Last weekend, I saw “Burnt,” starring Bradley Cooper, at the Bangor Mall Cinemas. The recently released film follows the story of an acclaimed chef who ruined his career — and the two Michelin star restaurant he headed up — with drugs and other bad behavior, but has cleaned up. He returns to Europe to vindicate himself by opening a new restaurant worthy of receiving the coveted and rare third Michelin star from the top-secret restaurant reviewers for the guidebook.

Before he can open the restaurant though, he has to figure out what to serve that will wow patrons and reviewers alike by testing recipes for the restaurant and having anyone who will taste them. Despite his efforts, the opening doesn’t go as planned, and the food is panned in reviews as dated. So, he tries again — perfecting more recipes, seeking that flawless state he craves.

Critics and moviegoers were critical of the film. A review in Variety magazine by Justin Chang called the movie, “a moody-foodie therapy session that follows an increasingly tidy nar-

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PEANUT CHICKEN WONTONS SERVES 8

INGREDIENTS

- 2 tbsp canola oil
- 1 cup diced rotisserie chicken
- 1 cup coleslaw mix (found near the lettuce)
- 1 tbsp peanuts, chopped
- 30 wonton wrappers

INGREDIENTS FOR SAUCE

- 1/4 cup creamy peanut butter
- 1/4 cup seasoned rice vinegar
- 2 tbsp soy sauce
- pinch crushed red pepper

DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Brush a baking sheet with a little canola oil, taking care not to use it all. (Hint: you may need a second baking sheet.)
2. In a mixing bowl, stir together the chicken, coleslaw mix and peanuts. Set aside.
3. In a separate mixing bowl, whisk together the peanut butter, rice vinegar, soy sauce and crushed red pepper until smooth. Add 3 tablespoons of the sauce mixture to the chicken mixture and stir well to combine. Reserve the remaining sauce for dipping.
4. Divide the filling evenly among the wonton wrappers, moistening the edges with water and folding diagonally. Press the edges to seal. Place on the prepared baking sheet or sheets. Brush the wontons with the remaining oil.
5. Bake for 8–12 minutes, turning once, until golden brown. Serve with the sauce.



RECIPE: SARAH WALKER CARON
ART: ERIC ZELZ

A gnarly root vegetable to try

If you like celery, you’ll love celeriac. The homely, gnarly root can be mashed like potatoes, grated raw into salad, sliced into chips for dipping, chunked for roasting, julienned for stir-fry, all versions tasting powerfully like celery. Celeriac greens look like super-sized parsley and can be finely chopped for salad, adding to soup or mixing with other greens in sauteed or steamed vegetables.



SANDY OLIVER
TASTE BUDS

Unless you grow celeriac, you probably won’t end up with the leafy tops, but I was blessed by my neighbor Helen Barrett, who gave me two celeriacs with tops intact which I chopped very finely in the food processor, and added to a bunch of sauteed leeks and leftover mashed potatoes to make soup with knock-your-socks-off parsley flavor. This late in the season, celeriac leaves verge on tough, hence the chopping. The stems look just like celery ribs only very skinny, and earlier in the season I bet one could harvest some for a celery substitute.

Mashed Celeriac

Serves 2-3

1 celeriac root weighing three-quarters to one pound
Milk
Butter
Salt and pepper

Peel the celeriac and cut into chunks as you would potatoes. Add just enough water to cover, and bring to a boil, then turn down to a simmer. Cook until very tender. Mash as you would potatoes, adding a drizzle of milk to give you your desired consistency, and butter, salt and pepper to taste.

Most of us will find celeriac roots in stores, where we may have passed them by dozens of times because they look so unlikely, a root invented for a horror film version of turnip, with odd roots winding over the surface. Easy to peel, though, and then you can treat it like any other root vegetable.

I adore mashed celeriac. It has the comforting texture of mashed potatoes and that lovely celery flavor.

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J.B. FORBES | ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH | TNS

Polenta with gorgonzola is heated in the microwave oven to melt the cheese on top.

Polenta: Trendy dish was first a fad for the poor

BY DANIEL NEMAN
ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

You can go to a fancy store and buy a fancy 24-ounce bag of cornmeal for polenta, and it will cost you \$3.99.

I think that’s hilarious. In recent years, chefs at many of the best restaurants have discovered polenta, though the fad is dying down a bit. But it is easy to understand why it is

so popular. Properly made, polenta is smooth, creamy and astonishingly versatile. It’s also cheap. Polenta is what poor Italian families used to cook at the end of the month, when money was tight. You could make a great meal — and you know Italians are all about their great meals — for literally pennies (or a few lire).

What Italians know as polenta, Americans call grits. It’s just cornmeal. It

doesn’t have to cost \$3.99. The same amount of Quaker Yellow Cornmeal costs \$2.19. I was going to be using a lot, so I bought a 5-pound bag of Aunt Jemima’s Cornmeal for \$3.29. That’s about 4 cents per serving.

Admittedly, even at 16 cents per serving, the expensive stuff is still pretty cheap.

Polenta can be transcendently delicious if you make

it right, but making it right takes time and dedication. Basically, you have to stir. And stir. And stir.

But it is unquestionably worth the effort. If you’ve never had polenta that is perfectly smooth, like corn-flavored satin, you’ve never really had polenta.

I learned the method for extraordinary polenta from “The Silver Spoon,” which is more or less the Italian

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