

The Heritage of Brentwood chef earned stripes at country club

Carter strives for variety while not ignoring comfort food

BY VICKI STOUT • FOR WILLIAMSON A.M. • OCTOBER 3, 2010

Chef Chris Carter, a Spring Hill native, gave up his culinary gig at a Boca Raton, Fla., country club for a different sort of club, The Heritage of Brentwood, a retirement community for independent and assisted living.

He says there are many similarities, especially in the culinary arena.

"We treat our residents like country club members. Many of them have certainly lived that life. For the independent living side's 260 residents, our menus are sophisticated, yet friendly. We change them every two weeks," said the Nashville Tech Culinary School graduate.

Some of his diners have traveled the world; others are accustomed to Southern comfort food. He says he and his staff cater to both palates.

The menu reads like a fine dining restaurant with appetizer offerings ranging from feta-stuffed tomatoes to bacon-wrapped shrimp to spinach and artichoke dip.

Salads are several, ranging from spinach to Caesar to traditional garden greens with a wide range of dressing options.

A recent menu listed entrée selections of Lobster Thermidor, chicken picatta, pan-roasted striped bass, chili dusted scallops, coffee-rubbed flank steak and teriyaki chicken. Homestyle features included lasagna, pulled pork, spiral ham and Salisbury steak with choices of 12 side dishes.

"We change the menu often because some residents eat here daily; others come two to five times a week. Everything is cooked to order and most everything is made in house. On a typical evening, we will serve 175 guests, and at lunch 75 to 80. Our residents can bring their guests to dine, and we always enjoy that," he said.

Carter says he aims to offer a better dining experience on property than residents will have dining out elsewhere.

"We strive to have great food and have it priced for less," he said. "It's a challenge to strike the right balance with favorites and new dishes. We also have a lot of themed dinner nights like Thai and Italian."

Chef offers classes

He also offers monthly cooking classes; they last for one to two hours and are filmed so they can be aired on closed circuit television within the property. And similar to a country club dining establishment, this kitchen will honor special requests.

"If our diners want something that's not on the menu, we'll make it as long as we have the ingredients on hand," he said.

Like a restaurateur, he visits with his guests after meals, chatting to find out about the food and service, likes and dislikes.

"This is their kitchen; we just work in it. We want to please them with their choices, the quality of food, service and the prices," he said.

On the assisted living side, Carter and his staff cater to 30 to 35 individuals. A dietitian is on hand to help make sure nutritional and special dietary needs are met.

"We cycle this menu, too, but not as often as on the independent living side," he said.

"We are careful to provide certain percentages of protein, carbs, etc. We favor Southern-style foods like chicken and dumplings, breaded veal with mushroom gravy, barbecue, fish and chicken."

Carter says his kitchen caters to the entire community, and though it may not have golf and tennis, he considers the residents to be "members" whose names he wants to know and remember, just as in country clubs. He wants his dining room to compete with fine dining establishments off campus and come out on top. He seems to be a chef on a mission to please his customers, whatever their tastes and dietary requirements may be.

SHRIMP AND SCALLOP CEVICHE

Makes 8 servings

1 pound fresh scallops, chopped

1 pound fresh shrimp, chopped

1 cup fresh lime juice

½ cup fresh lemon juice

½ cup fresh orange juice

2 cups avocado, diced

1 cup red onion, minced

1 cup tomato, diced, seeded

½ cup cilantro, chopped

¼ cup olive oil

1 tablespoon jalapeno, minced

1 teaspoon salt

¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper

½ teaspoon cumin

Roughly chop shrimp and scallops and pat dry with a paper towel and place into a bowl.

Cover with the juices and let marinate until opaque, about an hour and a half, in the refrigerator.

Place seafood into a clean bowl and reserve the juice.

Add the remaining ingredients to the seafood and mix together gently.

Add the reserved juice to taste and refrigerate.

GAZPACHO

Makes 1 gallon

2 ½ pounds tomato, peeled, diced

½ large onion, medium diced

1 green bell pepper, medium diced

1 red bell pepper, medium diced

1 pound cucumber, peeled, seeded, diced

1 tablespoon garlic, minced

2 ounces red wine vinegar

2 ounces lemon juice

4 ounces olive oil

Salt and pepper to taste

Cayenne pepper to taste

Fresh breadcrumbs (optional) as needed

3 quarts tomato juice

Garnish (all diced):

8 ounces tomato

4 ounces red bell pepper

4 ounces green bell pepper

4 ounces yellow bell pepper

3 ounces cucumber, peeled, seeded

2 ounces green onion

Fresh basil as needed

Combine all ingredients in food processor blender except tomato juice and garnish.

Stir in tomato juice.

Adjust the consistency with tomato juice.

Stir in vegetable garnishes and adjust seasonings.

VICHYSOISE

Makes 1 gallon

2 quarts leeks, diced and rinsed, white part only

2 quarts baked potatoes, peeled and diced

3 quarts vegetable or chicken stock

1 cup milk

1 cup heavy cream

Salt and pepper to taste

Cut and rinse the leeks in cold water and add to stock pot.

Peel potatoes and add to pot. Add stock and bring to a simmer for 30 minutes.

Remove from heat, add cream and milk, and puree.

Season with salt and pepper.



Chef Chris Carter of The Heritage of Brentwood, an independent-living community, prepares meals for residents on Sept. 21. (GEORGE WALKER IV / THE TENNESSEAN)