

Sheboygan shines with culinary gems

Dining

MICHAEL MUCKIAN

Sheboygan's culinary legacy has always been the bratwurst, but over time the city has reached beyond the bun. Today the former industrial community, barely 58 miles north of Milwaukee as the seagull flies along Lake Michigan's shore, is home to an unexpected number of fine dining restaurants. City leaders hope these culinary outposts will help drive the resurgence of a dormant downtown.

Sheboygan is legally known as America's Bratwurst Capital, an honor of which it is proud and one that it celebrates the first weekend of each August. And the mammoth Miesfeld's Meat Market, a staple since 1941, still sells 1.8 million brats each year.

But the community of 51,000 people has found more exciting ways to dine out, and those options are

beginning to attract attention from well beyond the city limits.

Margaux Bistro & Wine Bar, 821 N. Eighth St., offers a continental menu long on substance and creativity. Chicago-born chef/owner Rob Hurrie cut his culinary teeth at the nearby American Club in Kohler, the state's only five-star resort. He mixes the knowledge he gained there with an appreciation for organic foods. The restaurant grows much of its own produce and herbs on a farm owned by Hurrie for just that purpose.

On the menu, bacon mac-and-cheese, made with white truffle oil and crisp prosciutto sits side by side with caramelized sea scallops, served with roasted fennel, creamed leeks and lemon carrot coulis. And the choices just get better from there.

The Margaux Wine School is part of the restaurant and will begin offering monthly classes again starting in the fall. Certified sommelier Jaelyn Stuart recently



The interior of Margaux.

PHOTO: COURTESY

earned top honors as Great Lakes regional winner in the Guild of Sommeliers competition. She will advance to the national competition in San Francisco in August. Stuart also teaches classes in Milwaukee and Chicago through the Milwaukee-based Midwest Wine School.

Located amid new development along the Sheboygan River, Lino Ritorante Italiano,

422 S. Pier Drive, raises the bar for Italian restaurants everywhere. Owner Lino Autiero and chef Marco Rossi bring new sophistication to traditional cuisine in the restaurant across the road from the enormous Blue Harbor Resort. The calamaretti fritti offers lightly breaded calamari superbly done, while the risotto with white truffle oil is succu-

lent and flavorful. And one couldn't rave enough about the grilled walleye with mussels in a light tomato-spinach broth, or the tender Osso Bucco served with another creamy risotto.

Located between these two restaurants are four eateries and an organic grocery store owned by chef Stefano Viglietti: Trattoria Stefano, 522 S. Eighth St., Il Ritrovo, 515 S. Eighth St., The Duke of Devon English Pub & Eatery, 739 Riverfront Drive and Field to Fork Café and Grocery, 511 S. Eighth St.) By all accounts, Viglietti, who abandoned a Chicago real estate career to cook, is the driving force behind Sheboygan's culinary renaissance.

Trattoria Stefano serves classic Italian dishes based on fare that Viglietti, a Sheboygan native, experienced during month-long childhood visits to Florence, Italy. Il Ritrovo is one of three Wisconsin restaurant members of the Associazione Verace Pizza Napoletana, the international group dedicated to

preserving and promoting Neapolitan-style pizza.

The Duke of Devon is an authentic English – not Irish – pub, and Field to Fork combines an Italian and organic market with a restaurant, both tethered by a devotion to local, sustainable food.

"I like to smell the bread baking, the coffee brewing and the smoke of a wood-fired oven," says Viglietti, who runs 10 miles a day to keep off the weight his devotion to food would inevitably cause him to gain. "I believe in the senses, because they make us who we are."

Field to Fork stocks everything from pastas from Italy to yellow organic tomatoes from Antigo – and highlights local producers. Viglietti makes sure he cooks with local produce as much as possible in his restaurants.

A sign on the grocery store wall says it all: "The shorter the distance from field to fork ... the better."

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