

FARM TO TABLE DINNER

It Takes a Village

Established in 1840, The Inn at Twin Linden, which is located along Route 23 in Churchtown, has been owned by Kyra and Mike Scalea since 2022. One Saturday a month from May through October, the inn and a notable percentage of the village’s citizenry gather to present and sample the best the local area has to offer through a six-course, farm-to-table dinner series.

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY JORDAN BUSH

Set against the backdrop of the Welsh Mountains, dinner is typically held on the lawn that overlooks rolling fields that turn golden in the evening sun. Those whose backs are to the fields are not deprived of scenic vistas, as they have a view of the inn’s gorgeous gardens. On those occasions, a long table and 40 chairs are set up beneath string lights. Adding to the ambiance are chickens who wander about searching for dropped morsels.

For the May dinner, the windy and cool weather prompted a move into the barn for a more comfortable evening. It, too, is pure Lancaster County.

THE MENU CHANGES over the course of the season, depending on specialty items available at local farm stands and producers. “Dinner is based on what [the chefs] find on Friday,” says Mike. “Beef comes from a local Amish [cattle producer] down the street, Anthony Martin Meats,” he continues.

CHEF JOHN BANES and sous chef Don Maue spend days preparing for the dinner. From planning the menu

to shopping locally for ingredients, the prep work begins on Friday after sourcing ingredients at all the local stops is completed. On Saturday morning, they arrive at 10 a.m. for the 6 p.m. dinner, where they’ll be working until after 9 p.m. Because the duo have been working together in restaurants since 1998, so much of the cooking happens without a need to verbally communicate with each other. Recently, Chef Banes launched Twin Linden Catering for events away from the inn. “It’s another branch of the Twin Linden tree,” he explains.

The “Mayor” to the Rescue

At the Inn, as well as in Churchtown, intersecting worlds combine to create a sense of community. When Kyra and Mike took ownership of the inn, having moved there from Chester County in 2022, they immediately discovered the depth of caretaking at hand. They soon learned that anytime a specialized need arose, all they needed to do was look to their local community for solutions.

One name that kept popping up was

Harvey Shirk, who lives across the field from the inn and is a “retired” farmer who knows everyone and where to go for seemingly everything. “Harvey Shirk is like the mayor around here,” says Mike. “One day he came to us, knocked on the door, and said, ‘Hi, I’m Harvey Shirk.’ I’m like, ‘Oh, my gosh, I’m supposed to meet you! Thank you for coming over,’” Mike recounts.

Harvey has a knack for connecting the inn to all the best resources and people around Churchtown (and beyond). This is the kind of wisdom acquired through a lifetime of personal connections and knowledge that can’t be obtained any other way. For example, a fan motor recently needed to be repaired for one of the rooms. Harvey unmounted the motor from the ceiling, looked it over, and handed it to Mike with a slip of paper containing an address. Trusting Harvey, Mike followed the directions to a nondescript machine shop in New Holland that Mike admits he otherwise would have never found. They were expecting Mike’s arrival and were able to repair the motor.



Clockwise from top left: Place settings and floral arrangements were styled by Mike and Kyra’s daughter Emmie Diluzio. Kyra (left) with a few of the Amish girls from the Churchtown community who assist with dinner service. Established in 1840, The Inn at Twin Linden has been owned by Kyra and Mike Scalea since 2022. Emmie put hosta leaves to use for seating assignments. The cool and windy weather prompted a pivot to the events barn, where table linens, fresh flowers and vintage tableware greeted guests. Chef John Banes (left) and sous chef Don Maue begin plating the salad course.





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Perfectly seared fillet mignon are removed from the grill.



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ON THE MENU

- The first course was billed as a "Bite." Bacon-wrapped dates stuffed with blue cheese from Shellbark Hollow Farm in Honey Brook, and finished with a balsamic glaze created a dish that was salty and sweet with smoky notes and a decadent texture.
- The second course was an Appetizer Trio that's sure to please. A beef Wellington spring roll, with Dijonette and finely minced meat, was savory and tangy. The roasted-tomato bruschetta was comprised of bright diced tomato, micro greens and crispy bruschetta. Finally, the wild berry goat cheese tartlet delivered bright acidity, subtle sweetness, creamy filling and the perfect flaky crunch.
- The third course was comprised of Salad. Ingredients included organic greens from the inn's garden, sliced honey crisp apples, pickled red onion, candied pecans, feta cheese and strawberry champagne vinaigrette. The juicy and sweet apples, salty feta against the fresh lettuce, candied pecans and pickled onions made for a refreshing and complex dish.
- The fourth course focused on Meat. Grass-fed, pan-seared fillet mignon was paired with roasted cauliflower, sweet potato puree and spring herb chimichurri. Breaking my seven-year beef fast, the medium fillet was tender, juicy and satisfying. The herb chimichurri complemented it well. The roasted cauliflower was a little sweet and not dry, creating a pleasing texture. The sweet potato puree was the best sweet potato *anything* I've ever tasted; extremely simple, not overdone with sweetness.
- The fifth course featured Fish. Oven-roasted salmon with saffron tomato was accompanied by Jasmine rice, sautéed spinach, kale and white wine lemon crab butter.
- Finally, the sixth course, Dessert! Spring Berry Trifle was made with vanilla-bean angel food cake, topped with fresh berry trio, lemon Chantilly cream, fresh mint and lemon zest. Served in small mason jars, the berry-forward dessert was a delight, with a bright lemon zest and mint finish.



Kyra invites the Churchtown neighborhood kids who helped with the dinner to join the staff meal that is served at the conclusion of dinner service.

It Takes a Village

Officially, Churchtown doesn't have a mayor, and technically, the inn's address has been listed as Narvon ever since Churchtown's post office closed. Whether you call it Churchtown or Narvon, it's the locals who define the community whose first settlers were of Welsh heritage.

"The people who grew up here are the kindest, most helpful people I've ever met," says Kyra. "They know everybody, they know where everything is. You can get anything you need. Everyone helps each other out," she continues. "There's something extra special about everyone coming together to host the dinner," she notes. "Our staff, our neighbors, it is so awesome to have them help us represent The Twin Linden and Churchtown to our guests. The farmers, the growers, the neighborhood folks, we like to welcome everybody. It's the best of Churchtown, presented by Churchtown," she continues.

WHEN IT COMES to the inn's success, the gracious hosts can't help but look around at their community support system. "There are way more people who work here than just those who were here tonight," says Kyra. "The people who help take care of the grounds, buildings, painting... It's all local people."

Family is also heavily involved. Chef Banes is Kyra's brother. Her nephew Jack is their electrician, while Jack's girlfriend Jennie oversees the inn's social media. They've had cousins, nieces and in-laws as part of the service team. For the May dinner, Mike and Kyra's daughter, Emmie, working with Terrain and Table Designs in Elverson, took charge of the table décor, including the floral arrangements, with product procured from Legacy Acres Family Farm.

Even children from the surrounding Plain community pitch in. Their giggles and whispers echo all the way down the steps, as they help carry plated courses to the dinner table and empty plates

back to the kitchen. After dinner, they gather for their own meal shared with everyone who participated that evening.

EVENTUALLY, THE EVENING grows calm and quiet. Some nights, Mike will light a fire for guests to enjoy before heading home or retiring to their rooms at the inn.

Conversations among guests wind down, and in the kitchen, all the dishes are washed, ready to serve another day. As to when the innkeepers get to relax, "I will start having my glasses of wine soon," says



Jordan Bush is a commercial photographer. His work has allowed him to discover and document cultures and food across five continents. A graduate of Garden Spot High School and Millersville University, Jordan and his fiancée, Jessica, reside and cook together in Ephrata.



Clockwise from top left:

The inn's event barn serves as a quaint countryside backup for dinners when inclement weather is anticipated.

Chef John Banes greets guests, walking them through May's six-course menu.

Guests could enjoy the inn's gardens before and after dinner.



Kyra as the evening comes to a close. It is a well-earned reward.

AS FOR A REVIEW: You couldn't pick a better spot. This countryside inn was made for summer.

The Menu ... the Best of Summer

Twin Linden's menu follows a six-course format, comprised of seasonally available food gathered from around the Churchtown area. Inspired by each new harvest, the menu is often edited to make room for last-minute inclusions

whenever fresh delights are found. On this occasion, Harvey Shirk's family provided five pounds of asparagus. The season's first strawberries (picked from the inn's strawberry patch) were also a late addition.

"We're trying to take these ingredients and make them the best we can, with the season and setting in mind," says Chef Banes. "We let the flavors speak for themselves. Keep it simple, keep it honest," he theorizes. By the evening's end, every inch of the kitchen had been utilized, and they didn't seem to break a sweat. "[Don] tries to stay

behind the scenes," says Chef Banes. "He says he's in witness protection, but we gotta give him props."

Tickets

The Inn at Twin Linden's dinners are open to the public. Cocktails are complimentary, with the option for guests to bring wine or beer. A hat is passed at the end of the night as a thank you to the staff. The next dinner will be held July 25.

For details, visit innattwinlinden.com or call 484-319-5884.