

the Hippo

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NEW EATS
P. 22 & 23

CUCUMBER
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LOCAL NEWS, FOOD, ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

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INSIDE: SINGING TOGETHER AGAIN

News from the local food scene

By Matt Ingersoll
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FOOD

Italian traditions

Rig A Tony's expands to Bedford; new Windham and reopened Derry spots on the way

• **New spot for Granite State Naturals:** After temporarily closing over the holiday weekend, longtime health store **Granite State Naturals** opened a new location on July 6, in the adjacent property on the corner of Granite Avenue and North State Street in Concord. Executive Chef Rob Cone has worked with owner Matt Jeannotte to expand the business into more of a superette — new items include grab-and-go sandwiches made with meats from North Country Smokehouse, as well as a variety of house side dishes, grain salads, house marinated meats, and dairy products sourced from both Brookford Farm in Canterbury and Huckins Farm in New Hampton. There is also now a selection of about 40 beers, ciders, seltzers, ready-to-drink cocktails and hard kombuchas, plus various wines from organic and biodynamic vineyards. The new location is open Monday through Saturday, from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., and Sunday, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Visit granitestatenaturals.com.

• **Canning and pickling:** Join the Rodgers Memorial Library (194 Derry Road, Hudson) for **Preserving the Harvest**, a virtual program in pickling, canning, freezing and drying your own food that's scheduled for Monday, July 12, from 7 to 8 p.m. Mark Gostkiewicz of Tri Gable Lea Farm in eastern Connecticut will discuss the pros and cons of each of these methods, as well as what details to pay attention to in order to avoid spoilage or food poisoning. Simple at-home projects using basic kitchen equipment will also be introduced during this live Zoom presentation. Participants can register at events.rodgerslibrary.org. If you can't make the live class but still want to learn the information, a recording will be emailed to you, in addition to handouts and references that will be covered during the talk.

• **Wine and barbecue:** Get your tickets now for the next **monthly wine dinners at the Colby Hill Inn** (33 The Oaks, Henniker), set for Friday, July 16, and Saturday, July 17, in The Grazing Room. The event will feature a three-course dinner with wine on Friday evening, followed by an a la carte barbecue lunch beginning at noon on Saturday, then a three-course dinner that evening at 6 p.m. with pairings of McPrice Myers wines. The Colby Hill is also continuing its Sunday night out events with seatings on Sunday, July 11, from 4 to 7 p.m., where you can enjoy local seafood, barbecue items, and flight trios of wine, beer and sake. Visit colbyhillinn.com.

• **Eating local:** Half of Granite Staters report buying food from local farms at least twice a month, according to a University of New Hampshire news release. The research, which was conducted by UNH's **Carsey** 24 ▶



Rigatoni, broccoli and chicken (top dish) and sausage abruzzo (bottom dish). Photo courtesy of Rig A Tony's.



Chicken marbella. Photo courtesy of Rig A Tony's.



Uncle June's Garden sandwich. Photo courtesy of Rig A Tony's.

By Matt Ingersoll
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Lisa DeSisto was gearing up for a 20th anniversary celebration of Rig A Tony's Italian Takeout — and had just opened a second location in Windham — when the pandemic hit, followed by a fire in May 2020 that forced the closure of the downtown Derry Rig A Tony's.

"I wasn't going to close during Covid because I wasn't going to let it defeat me," said DeSisto, who is also in her second season as owner of Clam Haven in Derry. "Then when the fire happened, it made me say, 'OK, I have an opportunity to rebuild my restaurant. What else can we rebuild and do differently?' It made me start to think about what was next."

A year later, DeSisto and her team are hard at work on reopening the original Rig A Tony's on West Broadway in Derry, and the Windham location is moving into a larger space four doors down. Both are on track to open later this year. Meanwhile, a new Rig A Tony's in Bedford opened last month, and while a third location hadn't been part of DeSisto's initial plans, she couldn't pass up the chance to purchase the space that was previously home to Table 8 Pasta.

DeSisto has teamed up with longtime industry professionals Rich Vellante and Jason Berkman, who each now serve as business associates of the

company. Vellante is the former executive chef and executive vice president of restaurants for Legal Sea Foods, a role he held for two decades. His and DeSisto's families also happen to hail from the same region of Italy.

"With Jason and Rich, I was [introduced] to all these elevated products that I didn't even know existed," DeSisto said. "I feel like they're here helping me carry on the family legacy."

All three Rig A Tony's locations have the same takeout and catering menus, which are filled with new options. Appetizers include wood-grilled Tuscan wings with lemon, rosemary and Calabrian pepper sauce; a whipped feta cheese dip with roasted pepper

puree, garlic and parsley; and seared broccoli rabe with white beans, garlic, red chili flakes and white wine. Notable additions to the entrees menu are beer-braised boneless short ribs with a mustard glaze and stewed vegetables, and a spit-roasted porchetta with roasted carrots and apricot pesto.

"Porchetta is something you don't see too often that we've introduced," Vellante said. "It's a highly seasoned pork that we do as a meal and on a sandwich as well. ... We use fennel pollen, which gives it a more aromatic and floral flavor and smell to it."

You'll still find lots of Rig A Tony's favor-

“When the fire happened, it made me say, ‘OK, I have an opportunity to rebuild my restaurant.’”

LISA DESISTO

ites on each of the menus too, from chicken or eggplant Parmesan to spaghetti and meatballs, Sicilian pan pizzas and other Italian staples. Even the pastas and the tomato sauces have received upgrades of their own.

"We chose to use the De Cecco brand pasta. They dry it in a very slow process, and also cut it with a bronze die, so what it does is it holds up a lot better and just complements the sauce," Vellante said. "We tested a lot of different tomatoes, and what makes them taste so good is the soil. ... These tomatoes that we have are actually grown at the base of Mount Vesuvius, and so it's that volcanic soil that makes the difference."

There are also new selections of savory salads, like pesto burrata and Sardinian couscous, and sweet treats from cannolis and Italian cookies to tiramisu and whoopie pies. Inspired by Vellante's 2-year-old dog Barbutto, there is even a section of the takeout menu that is dedicated to man's best friend, featuring homemade dog treats and hearty bowls, like chicken with sweet potato and peas, or beef with brown rice and carrots. 🐾

Rig A Tony's Italian Takeout & Catering

Bedford: 254 Wallace Road (now open); current hours are Tuesday through Saturday, 11 a.m. to 8 p.m., and Sunday, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Derry: 38 W. Broadway (reopening; coming soon)

Windham: 13 Rockingham Road (coming soon)

Visit rigatonysitalian.com, find them on Facebook and Instagram @rigatonysitalian or call 488-2877