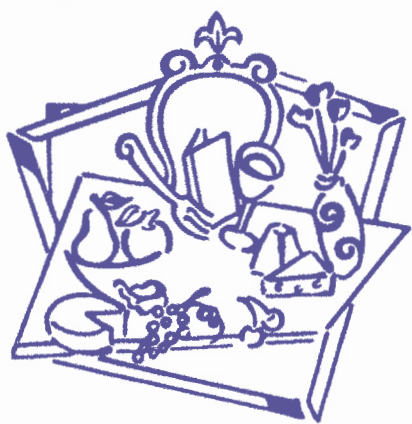


The American Cheese Society

N E W S L E T T E R

THREE CHEFS AND A CHEESE

By Judy Schad



The American South offers food so various that in the space of 50 miles you seem to taste a different country – “she” crab soup, pink and delicate, from the Tidewater; “hoppin john” from North Carolina; rich, salty hams and woody bourbons from Kentucky; and smoky

boudin sausages from the bayous. But there is a common connection, something definably “Southern,” especially in the food of the poor, the slaves and dirt farmers whose European and African roots have become inseparable. I grew up a few minutes and a million cultural miles north of the Mason-Dixon line in southern Indiana, just north of Louisville, where everyone – regardless of color, politics, or religious persuasion – ate “greens” and okra with corn and tomatoes. My grandmother Flora’s garden was rich with full flavored lettuces, mustards and kale wilted with her own cider vinegar and served with my granddad’s fresh pulled onions and salt-cured jowl bacon. He raised vegetables and chickens; she cooked them in the cool of the morning for Sunday dinner.

Food was simple and abundant, but all of it was used to its best advantage – a young hen got roasted in its own broth and

the old one was rendered for chicken fat to make a pie crust that dissolved in the mouth. We ate food in season. After sun-warmed June strawberries, who would want them hollow, tasteless and gassed to redness? We opened jewel-like jars of fruit jam in January, crocks of sauerkraut and pickles to remind us that summer would come again. Food was at its best, dependent on basic ingredients and the craft of the maker. Great cheeses begin in that same, simple place, where richness describes flavor and not price per pound. To think Southern, you have to believe that in a better world, we can all go there again.

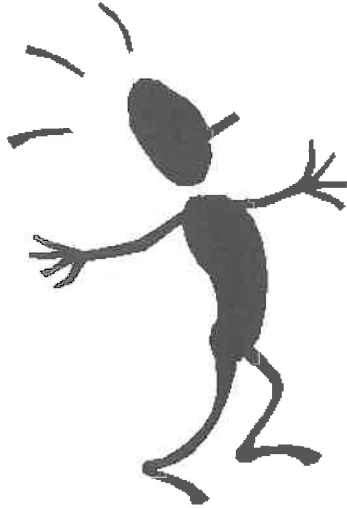
I’ve interviewed three Southern chefs who are all customers I’ve worked with for several years. They represent relaxed, fine dining restaurants with a \$50-60 price tag. They’re the real “goods,” and reflect Southern food as style and memory. All have received local and national recognition. Their restaurants are testimony that the best marketing is not, as my grandmother said, “everything in the window, and nothing in the store.” It’s about doing the real thing. They select the best and the freshest and prepare it simply and seasonally. It’s not surprising they see great cheese as a part of their food profile or that they have wonderful cheese courses on their menus, served alone and without frills, with American cheeses often receiving top billing.

Joe Castro is one of the best cooks I know. He’s now chef of the Camberly Brown Hotel, a Louisville landmark that overflows on the first Saturday of every May with Derby visitors

Please see CHEFS.....

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LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT



Like many of you, I spend an enormous amount of time criss-crossing the countryside, spreading the good word about American specialty cheese. Equally, I spend a lot of time listening to our members' comments, criticisms and new ideas. With this year's conference a few short months away and the ACS' debut at this summer's Fancy

Food Show even closer, I'd like to take this opportunity to thank those of you who respond to our pleas for input, fill you in on our progress, and ask that you pass along the information.

This year the American Cheese Society has been accepted as a trade organization to the NASFT (National Association for the Specialty Food Trade). This venue must be self-supporting. The cost to each participant, yet to be etched in stone, will be approximately \$500. The plan is simple. For our cheesemakers who are not currently members of the NASFT, the ACS will act as an agent on your behalf and present your cheeses first to the NASFT's admissions committee and then, upon acceptance, on the show floor. Participation will be on a first come, first serve basis. With a commitment to take one 8'x10' booth and a 6' refrigerated display case, we should be able to showcase a maximum of 15-20 cheesemakers and their products. Each cheesemaker will be asked to supply us with product samples, product information, availability, method of distribution, etc. For those cheesemakers who are current members of the NASFT and

exhibit on the show floor, we will, of course, want your point of sale materials and will refer interested buyers to your or your distributors' booths. In the coming weeks, all member cheesemakers will be receiving more detailed information. Our long-term goal is to create an American Cheese Society Pavilion in the hopes of increasing not only an appreciation of our American specialty cheesemakers, but our membership.

Close on the heels of the Fancy Food Show is this year's conference at Shelburne Farms. I have seriously taken all your comments into account. I am constantly asking the questions, "What do you want to learn at our conference?" and "What will entice you to attend?" This year's program will take a slight departure from the norm with a concentration on retail workshops and panels on Friday; foodservice panels and workshops are slated for Saturday. Throughout both days, we hope to engage the expertise of our cheesemakers, academia, distributors, retailers and chefs. The Vermont Cheese Council is hard at work writing and organizing the cheesemakers' portion of the program, scheduled for all day Thursday. There will be significant revisions in the annual judging and, back by popular demand, there will be a judging workshop. The raw milk vs. mandatory pasteurization debate will be addressed throughout.

This quarter's newsletter focuses on our members in the Southeast and is the beginning of a new, work in progress, format. We hope you like it. Welcome Kate Sander, Cheese Market News, as our new copy editor. Coming issues will include technical information for our cheesemakers and a continued regional focus. Additionally, you should begin to see changes in the website. There's no deadline on your comments and we look forward to hearing from you.

Ruth Anne Flore

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A LOOK AT FARMSTEAD CHEESEMAKING

By: Laura Jacobs-Welch



Alyce Birchenough, Sweet Home Farm, in Alabama, is a great example of a cheesemaker who knows exactly what market she wants to serve, and she has had no problems turning down the romance of "national" distribution. The Sweet Home Farm is located about 10 miles from the Gulf of Mexico. This 60-acre dairy houses 12 milking Guernseys, and Alyce turns their milk into about 12,000 pounds of cheese annually, all of which is sold in the region.

Being "food sufficient" is what first attracted Alyce Birchenough and Doug Wolbert to cheesemaking, along with the back to the earth movement and the independence of operating their own business. Alyce has a bachelor's degree in food and nutrition, and she liked the idea of manufacturing cheese. Back in 1978, they had a family cow, a Jersey not known for a pleasant disposition but with milk enough to make cheese. They constantly kept their ears open for news of plants in the Midwest that were closing and had equipment for sale. Finding a real deficit of existing equipment suppliers for the farmstead cheesemaker, they ended up searching through junk yards and spending time at auctions. Their cheese vat was a milk tank found in a junk yard and converted.

Alyce began to practice her art and tried all the different families of cheese. It has only been recently that she has found a number of cheesemakers focusing on just a few varieties. While in Michigan, they lived on a farm that wasn't really suited to dairying, but they knew that dairying and cheesemaking was really where they were headed in the business. They just weren't all that fond of the Midwest winters, so they chose to "fly south" to Elberta, Ala. (Alyce was raised in Louisiana.) The Jersey cow was replaced by a nice young herd of Guernseys, a breed whose protein levels are similar to the Jersey, allowing for more solids for the cheesemaking process. A better attitude didn't hurt either!

If you look at a map, you will note that Elberta is about as far south as you can go before driving into the Gulf of Mexico. The farm they found was of good soil and feed was available for the dairy venture. After a year and 11 trips of moving equipment, household, and finally cows, they were re-situated in Alabama. Milking and cheesemaking are done year round, though Alyce did consider seasonal production at one time. The summers are terribly hot, and hard on everything. However, "it was very hard to be dry in summer and still have enough cheese for her Christmas market," so the idea was dropped. Alyce notes that setting up the dairy and cheese plant has been a worthwhile process, as the new farm has been a great find. "Everything just clicked," she says, and they are quite happy with the business they have built.

The Sweet Home Farm is located 3/4 mile off a main highway and on a main road. However, the closest specialty food store was 25-30 miles to the east, and another the same distance to the west. The Alabama regulators had no experience with a regional farmstead cheesemaking operation, but were helpful, and used the federal regulations to get the farm set up with a Grade A license. Alyce and Doug began by shipping fluid milk until they could get their processing set up. A friend helped them with a press release, the local newspaper featured an article about the endeavor, and the rest is history. Alyce says people came from all over, and they have been able to develop a

great relationship with the retail customer. Their farm "store" also offers a number of other regional specialty items, including jams, jellies and wines. Their location has made them a destination for many other "snow-birds," bird-watchers, and the beach crowd tourist-ing in the area. Alyce soon found people would bring her their garden produce and ask for her to make them a special cheese, using their "hot peppers" or other homegrown ingredients.

Alyce makes cheese three days a week, does artificial insemination work and milks the cows. Doug keeps very busy with field work and maintains anything and everything on the farm, as well as helps to run the store. Local feeds are used, with peanut hay providing a good legume source for the cows, in addition to the farm's own hay. There is no organic feed produced in the region, and though they'd love the opportunity to produce an organic product, having the feed shipped in would be prohibitive. Alyce tried making cheese every other day, but

found the schedule too strenuous and chose the three day a week schedule. She figures she'd rather be able to make her own cheese for a longer period of time than have to look for help or even face early retirement.

Today, Sweet Home Farm produces more than a dozen varieties of cheese. Originally, they were aging cheese in a clunky old cooler, but an aging room has been built to accommodate Alyce's love of the aged and ripened varieties of cheese. She would love to concentrate even more on an English farmhouse variety, and she finds the more flavorful, aged cheeses more challenging and much more to her liking. "Elberta" is the house cheese, a creamy, sliceable cheese akin to Havarti or a high moisture cheese. Alyce also has found a market for her cottage cheese by selling much of it to a nearby German community for use in their baking needs. Gouda and Jack are the farm's most popular sellers, and an extra aged, firm blue cheese also is manufactured.

Alyce enjoys the interaction with her retail customers, as well as the art of the cheesemaking process. Cheesemaking has been a challenge, and not everything has fallen in place quite so neatly – Alyce has had her share of nightmare work days as anyone in business. Like when the new bottle of coagulant's different application rate went unnoticed, and the new thermometer hadn't been calibrated, and the hot water heater kicked off – "the chickens enjoyed their meal that day." Or, when the culture she had purchased was found to be contaminated. Of course, it was some time before the culture company acknowledged the problem culture, and she ended up dumping both the rest of the culture and the cheese. She can look back with humor on those incidents now, but also notes that is becoming increasingly difficult to get suppliers to service the smaller market, and virtually impossible to locate the appropriate equipment. Alyce would like to see ACS become a better resource for cheesemakers for these needs, as well as become involved in providing audio visuals of plants with plant owners as "guest" moderators as part of the annual conferences. A more sharing and open educational forum would enable the industry to grow and flourish in the United States!



Alyce Birchenough and Doug Wolbert, co-owners, Sweet Home Farms, with some of their farmstead cheeses.

1999 16TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE RETURNS TO SHELBURNE FARMS

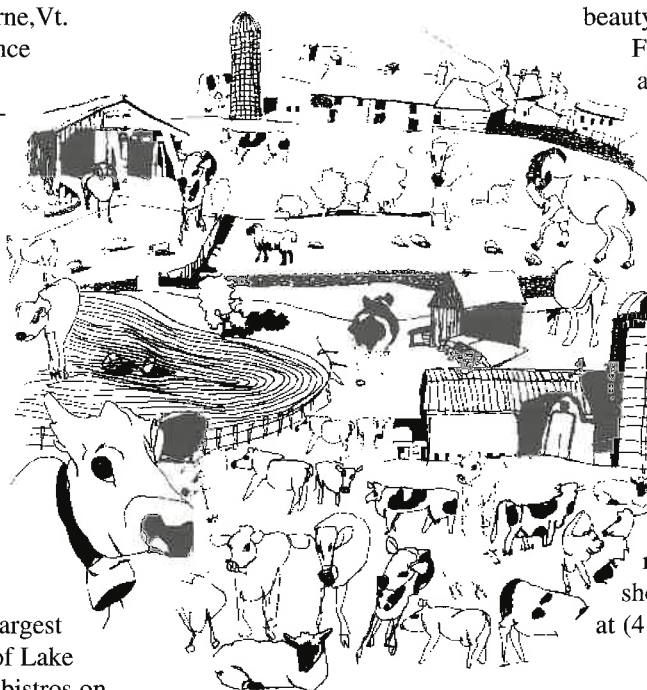
Our 16th Annual Conference has been set to take place in rural Vermont, at Shelburne Farms, Shelburne, Vt. The dates for the conference are August 12 - 15, 1999. Shelburne Farms is a non-profit educational organization on a historic 19th century working farm, dedicated to teaching students, teachers and the public the principles of conservation and land stewardship. Cheesemaking is just one of several businesses Shelburne Farms operates in order to fund its educational programs for more than 100,000 school children.

Burlington, Vermont's largest city, lies along the shore of Lake Champlain. Visit outdoor bistros on

Church Street, enjoy traditional New England Cuisine, soak in the rural beauty of the Green Mountains.

For those of you who are already planning your travel dates, hotel arrangements have been made at the Sheraton, Burlington @\$110/night for conference attendees. Please mention that you are attending the ACS conference for confirmed conference rates.

Phone: (800) 865-6117 or (800) 325-3535 ACS cheesemaker members interested in rooms set aside for them should contact the ACS office at (414) 728-4458.



WHAT'S NEW

By: Gretchen Morfogen

Dining Trends – Personal chef service is an option for people with no time or joy in cooking, without hiring a private chef. Being a single mother, I searched endlessly for a chef position that had sane hours, great wages and a harmonious working environment (but to my knowledge this doesn't exist in the industry – Ha!). With 18 years experience, I found the answer in a Monday through Thursday schedule where my work day is over before my children get home from school. I advertised for one month in the local paper and built my client base from referrals and casual conversation. I currently have half a dozen clients and they each spend on average \$550.00 per month for my services, which include shopping, cooking (in their homes), storing, labeling with reheating instructions and clean up.

Living in the Napa Valley has its advantages, one being that generally people have sophisticated palettes. I preplan menus until they know my style cooking. After that, I inform my clients of what I

have found in the market, and we go from there. For example, one of my clients is into components so I'll grill some chicken breasts, poach salmon fillets and do several side dishes and grilled vegetables. Then she has the option to mix and match to suit her family's tastes. This service is an incredible convenience for families with working parent(s) and/or very little time or experience in throwing together meals. One of the favorite dishes in the fall was Confit of whole duckling with caramelized onions, butternut squash, and wilted baby spinach and aged local goat cheese ("Carmela" from Goats Leap). Another was warm ravioli salad with toasted pine nuts, arugula, and lemon vinaigrette with shaved Manchego.

My recently acquired knowledge and appreciation of agriculture, affinage, retail, distributors and all aspects of the industry has accentuated and evolved my cooking and menu planning immeasurably.

CHEFS.....

Continued

expecting great Kentucky food. Joe provides it throughout the hotel, but especially in The English Grill, the Brown's four star restaurant. His mother was from Kentucky.

"So naturally, she baked country hams," he says, "but my father was a Filipino doctor. He'd have fish heads at midnight. It has given me an interesting perspective on food."

After college, Joe worked for a time at the Lai Lai Shangri La Hotel in Taipei before moving to Washington, D. C.'s Restaurant Lucie in the Embassy Row Hotel. When he came home to Louisville in 1992 to become chef of Grill, he brought international experience to his Kentucky kitchen.

"Food starts before it gets to me," he says. Imagine everything as coffee. It's only good when it's fresh brewed, he says. Joe's philosophy can be termed as "simple."

"Food should never require more than a fork on the table," he says, and hopes someday to have a family restaurant where the mashed potatoes are real and swimming with butter, the vegetables are fresh picked from Shelby County, and whole families can afford to sit down together.

Cliff Harrison and **Ann Quatrano**, chef/owners of Bacchanalia in Atlanta, met in 1987 in San Francisco at California Culinary Academy. Cliff grew up in Oahu, Hawaii, post World War II, where land was too valuable to grow local produce.

"We had a 'canned food society,'" he says, "a bad combination of bastardized cuisines."

Annie grew up in the kitchen of her Italian grandmother, a great cook, who even made her dry aged sausages. Annie's mother was from Georgia, where her family had owned a farm outside Atlanta since 1812. On a lark, Annie and Cliff decided to take a side trip from a North Carolina vacation to check it out.

They found a falling down house sitting on 60 acres with a river running through it, and a city gearing up for the Olympics.

"We moved a trailer onto the farm, ate at all the hip places we could, and decided we could do this," he says.

The result was four Jersey cows, a great new farmhouse, a new restaurant, Bacchanalia, usually rated tops in definitive food guides to Atlanta (#1 in the Zygote for the last 3 years), and the recently opened Floataway, a more casual, cafe-carry out.

Cliff says they wanted Bacchanalia to feel "like a country inn from the Loire Valley," a warm, welcoming place like their own farm kitchen, featured last year in Southern Living.

"I guess you would call it 'new American,'" says Cliff, "but personally, I don't know what that's supposed to mean. We just do it better than everyone else at a better price."

Susan Spicer, chef/owner of Bayona, began life as a "Navy brat," then was exposed to a lot of cuisine. She had classical French training in 1979 in New Orleans as apprentice to Chef Daniel Bonnot at the Louis XVI Restaurant. With food experience at Hotel Sofitel, Paris, and at Savoir Faire, Henri, and the Bistro at Maison de Ville, New Orleans, she formed a partnership with Regina Kever and opened Bayona in 1990.

Romantic and intimate, this 200-year-old Creole cottage in

the French Quarter is the perfect frame for Susan's simple, beautiful food, her quiet style, and her commitment to the city. Featured in numerous publications, including Food and Wine, Gourmet and Bon Appetit, she's the 1993 recipient of the James Beard Award for Best Chef in the Southeast.

In December 1997, in a renovated cotton warehouse, she opened Spice Inc., a specialty food market with take-out food and cooking classes. With friend and manager Ken Jackson, she offers cheeses so perfectly chosen and well affined that any cheesemaker would be proud to be included in the list. Paired with what may be the best whole-grain boule anywhere and some wonderful olives, it would be hard to ask for more.

Following are the questions I asked these chefs:

Generally what makes your food work? How is "cheese as cheese" a part of the whole?

Joe: We try to find mature flavors that don't come instantly in food. A great poivrade sauce starts as a simple stock — meat, water and seasoning. The stock cooks slowly for three to four weeks, and in the reduction, the deep, base flavors come through. Complexity, depth of flavor come from simple ingredients and process, not a hundred ingredients. We don't like tortured food that lost its simplicity and base with too much going on. Like? Chutney. I tell the crew that while cooking intensifies food flavor, it can also destroy it. Things should be what they are, and cheese is a great example of that. It's an ancient thing, beautiful like bread and wine. These things live, breathe just as they are—basic and necessary.

Cliff: Seasonality. It really governs our menu. We don't have asparagus on a winter menu; we have fingerling potatoes and cabbage. Right now a lot of our winter desserts are focused on citrus. Freshness is also important, and nothing is prepared ahead. We want to keep it simple; the food I grew up with required a lot of "stuff" and mixtures of ingredients. When green beans and asparagus are in season and come to you right out of the garden, it's hard to improve on. The flavors are that intense. I think cheese is a natural paired with seasonal salads and greens. It also stands alone, and we don't have to mess around with it. It turns me on just like wine does. Maybe it's because I'm not really a meat eater, but it's still an animal thing. Eventually, we plan to make our own cheese. I'm milking four Jerseys right now and will freshen four more in the spring. It's so hot here we try to give them their dry period in the summer. It's the seasonal thing again. Cheeses fit with the way we feel about food, the restaurant, the farm, the cheeses. It's all the same thing.

Susan: What makes it work is attention to detail, balance of flavors and, of course, quality of ingredients. While we borrow a lot from different cultures, I feel it's important to learn how the ingredients are used traditionally before I start messing around. I tend to respect the ability of a great cheese to speak for itself and take the "less is more" approach to serving it.

What's the difference, if any, in the cheeses you use on the cheese course and the ones you use as ingredients?

Joe: With so many different venues in the hotel, there's a price point difference between sandwich cheeses in the cafe and what we offer on our cheese course. It's all good, but you get what you pay for. In the cafe the average lunch costs \$9, so the cheese sauce on our "Hot Brown Sandwich" is made with a decent American, Swiss-style cheese and shredded Parm; on lunch salads we use an average Stilton in a blue cheese dressing, and we also use sharp Cheddar, ungrated Parmesan, smoked Gouda, Mozzarella, fresh goat cheese as ingredient cheeses, but we use good ones. I can't say that there's a place that quality doesn't count. I still wish all our grilled cheese sandwiches were made with Shelburne Farms Cheddar. We played with a fromage tort to use in the bar. We took all the bits and pieces of our great cheeses and mixed them up with oil and herbs. It was terrific, so we tried the same thing with the leftovers of some so-so stuff. Mrs. King, who's been here 50 years, called it "that nasty cheese ball." Some of our ingredient cheeses in the Grill could be on the cheese course, the Reggiano, Colston-Basset. We'll run five to six cheeses on the \$7 cheese course, a young, ripened goat cheese; a hard, aged cheese like Shelburne or Montgomery, maybe a Lancashire, Vella, Berkswell; a soft ripened cheese, Old Chatham's Camembert or Mutton Button; a stinky, washed rind—Mont St. Francis or Gubbeen; and blues like Cashel, Beenleigh, Great Hill, Valdeon. We almost always have Colston-Bassett to go with ports, and we serve the Mont with our great bourbons.

Susan: Certain cheeses stand alone. Others are equal or subordinate to other ingredients, and there are a few that do all these things. A banon would be eaten only on the cheese board. A Crowley is a really good cheese as an ingredient. It gives much more when combined with other ingredients than an average Colby, but it doesn't overwhelm. A Comte, or Vermont Cheddar could do all these things. We get a heavenly Gruyere at Spice. I'd love to use it but it's over \$20 a pound. With so many wonderful cheeses available price is not the first, or only factor, but it is a concern. Our ingredient cheeses? A lot of fresh, American goat cheeses, Vermont Cheddars, Parmigiano (both Reggiano and Grana), and Roquefort – probably Societe. We use domestic Ricotta and Cacciota, a Crescenza, and I'd really like to use more of these. On the \$7.00 cheese plate we serve three cheeses of an ounce each, and we use a great bread or wafer and other accoutrements that affect price. So, we need to keep our cost at about 75 cents an ounce.

Cliff: There aren't any differences between cheese course and ingredient cheeses on our menu because we don't really cook with cheese, but of the 5-6 salads we offer there will be an accompanying cheese — right now we have baby greens

served with shaved Skunk Hollow Cheese from Major Farms. We could also offer that cheese on the cheese course. Lovetree Cedar, Westfield's fresh cow and Capri, Shelburne Cheddar, Montgomery Cheddar, Capriole Mt. St. Francis, Sally Jackson's sheep and goat cheeses, Laura Chenel's Taupiniere, Great Hills Blue, Colston-Bassett Stilton, Coach's fresh goat logs, and always a good Reggiano – any of these cheeses could be served individually.

What are you looking for in the cheese on your cheese board?

Joe: We want a cheese great and simple enough to stand alone, like a Lancashire or Vella. The flavor and texture and ages should be distinctive, and the shapes and finish different.

Susan: The cheese has to have distinction, clarity and complexity. We look for a selection that offers differences in taste and texture. Shape and appearance are perhaps the least of it.

On a plate of three cheeses, we don't try to challenge anyone too much, perhaps one cheese might, like a Bleu de Tournignon or a big washed rind or aged goat.

Cliff: We look for the best, always.

How is the cheese course placed on your menu? How do you present it? And what presentation would you choose if you had no constraints?

Joe: The cheeses are listed on the first page of the dessert menu, with desserts on the second, and then after-dinner drinks. Hopefully, people expect to find them there. When someone orders the course, the server brings a tray to the table. Some cheeses – like a 60-pound Montgomery – have to be cut, but we try to keep visual of what the whole cheese looks like. That's part of the promise. After someone has chosen from five or six cheeses, or maybe all of them, we take them back to the kitchen, and cut and plate them.

There's more control of the cheeses with the kitchen staff, the tray looks better after 15 servings, and there's less waste. If I could have whatever I wanted? I saw a wonderful cheese cart last fall at a food show. Beautiful wood, glass, and about \$10,000. Maybe someday. Also, it would be great to have someone on the staff who was really cheese smart, who only did cheese.

Susan: The cheeses are listed as a selection on the dessert menu and briefly described as artisanal. When the waiter discusses the evening specials he also describes the three-cheese selection for the evening. We try to project what we might need that night and take the cheese out early to come to room temperature. It's plated in the kitchen with a fruit – usually apple or pear, and a slice of the whole-grain boule we do at Spice, or a sort of savory nut wafer we've come up with. It has just a hint of sugar, like a sweet, milled-wheat cracker. What



we're doing works, so I'm not sure I'd change it. I'd like to be able to present the cheese in it's entirety and then bring it back to the kitchen to cut and plate, but we just don't have time. Also, I wish we could do more to educate the kitchen staff. They love the cheese and if someone leaves a cheese untouched the waiters dive in like vultures. We've all learned. I remember when we had a visiting French chef in the restaurant, and we'd done a cheese plate that was full of fruit. This Frenchman had a fit. Now we let it speak for itself.

Cliff: We present cheese as part of the price fixed menu. You don't have to order it. That may be easier for people than thinking about it. And then we plate it which works well for us. We offer a small piece of five to seven cheeses. Some might also be included with a salad. We sell a ton of good cheese here!

How or where did you learn about these cheeses?

Susan: Kenny Jackson. He's the cheese man, and the quality controller. Before Kenny, I knew a little but not a lot. And with Spice, we always have a selection that we can choose from for the restaurant so we may change the selection.

Joe: You and I started working on a cheese course – over two years ago? I think a little guidance is a good place to begin, especially here, where there are so many kinds of food happening at once. For staff, coming to the farm, seeing the animals and the actual beginnings of the cheese and then the finished thing made it more real. Also nothing talks like our own experience and actually handling the cheeses. We use Jenkins' Cheese Primer if we need a profile of a cheese, or a detail for presentation. We've all learned, kitchen and wait staff. Remember when Debra [Dickerson] and Dominic [Coyte] came for the tasting of beer and Neal's Yard cheese? They worked hours with the staff while they prepared cheeses and everyone was mesmerized, listening to their comments. They inspired because they knew and loved what they were doing and there's no substitute for that. Neal's Yard cheeses have been a great mainstay because they feel familiar to people—especially older people. Also they're very good and predictable. They hold up well, even with some mishandling. Those are all things you learn to appreciate.



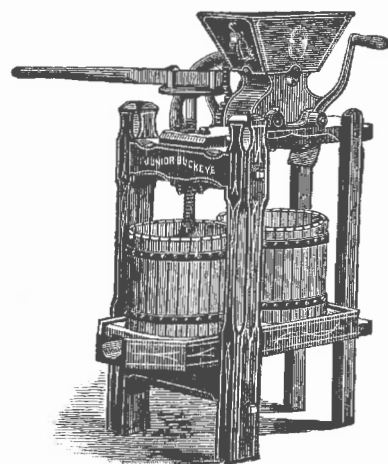
Cliff: I learned from Jenkins and asking around. I mean, how do you learn anything? Most of it you have to find out by doing the legwork yourself so you can take what you learn and apply it.

What does the cheese course do for the restaurant and where do you see this going? A trend or is it here to stay?

Susan: Cheese makes a statement about the quality of what we do. It reflects the food, the service. It doesn't necessarily make money, but it pays for itself and is a promotion point. We're definitely a part of what's happening in really fine restaurants everywhere. *USA Today* writing about fine, farm cheeses? Also, we see a noticeable difference in the reception of the customer to this course. This isn't foreign knowledge anymore. Good cheese is part of a general appreciation of good food. Is cheese a part of focusing regionally? Here? Not at all. Maybe if you were in New England or California and you had a wide variety of good, regional cheeses to choose from.

Joe: Cheese stands on its own, finished, like bread and wine. I think we have a customer who likes the simplicity of that. Also, to have great cheeses around gives us an edge. With all the venues here we can offer them on the private catering menu, and include them in private parties for customers who really appreciate them. So if we have 1/2 a Stilton left, or a bit of Tynning, it won't be wasted. Now, when you get on an airplane there's an article about American, farmhouse cheeses. So, if we don't have a recession and tighter money, I think the cheese course will stick around, though we're not a country where it has deep roots. Its been more of an amenity, like a good martini. All the trends say "Eat and drink less but eat and drink better" and we have more great American cheeses to choose from, as well as international ones.

Cliff: Great cheese is a part of our profile. This wasn't a great cheese city, but since we started doing a cheese course, everyone seems to be doing it—even the same cheeses. *Does that bother you?* Not really. Learning for yourself, doing the legwork, gives you the knowledge. If someone has to copy someone else's style or their menu, it's still just a copy. It's what makes you go out and look for it to begin with that you can't copy. We are all about doing the real thing here, and our customers know it.



A LOOK AT ONE GREAT RETAILER

By: Debbie Haws

The Cheese Shop
424 Prince George Street
Williamsburg, Virginia 23185
Ph. 757-220-0298
Fax 757-564-3927

Store Stats:
Total Area: 2,500 sq. ft.
Sales Area: 2,000 sq. ft.
Products: 2,000
Full-Timers: 13

Always looking ahead, the Cheese Shop, located in Williamsburg's Merchant's Square, uses the latest research that says "Americans need calcium" to its advantage. The most delicious way to obtain that calcium is to enjoy a delightful serving of natural hand-crafted cheeses, the company tells its customers. When owners Tom and Mary Ellen Powers started their first cheese shop in Tidewater in 1971, most people there had little knowledge or interest in specialty cheese, and they didn't know if there would be enough business to make their business a success. But they yearned to sell exceptional quality cheeses, wines and specialty foods to Tidewater's unwitting.

"They realized that if our concept proved premature, or ultimately was not accepted, then at least their young family would have great healthy food on the table" says Mary Ellen. Two years later they moved to their current location with the help of a loyal influential customer who didn't want to drive to Tidewater as often as she was. Decades later she is still a loyal and valued customer. The Powers expanded the store to its current 2500 square feet in 1975.

Tom and Mary Ellen and daughter Cathy (now store manager) celebrated the beginning of their second quarter century of business in 1997. The Cheese Shop continues to evolve as does the American palate.

"Our goal was then and still is to provide an environment which encourages the understanding, appreciation and the promotion of farmstead and specialty cheeses, fine wines and the highest quality specialty foods. Each year we travel to different cities and around the country to attend the National Fancy Food Show and various specialty food conferences. It is critical to stay in the know in our industry. We love to discover new products especially those by artisan producers," Mary Ellen says.

"Our customers are food lovers and are increasingly interested in their food's origins and cultural history...they want to know the story behind the product," she continues. "Cheese forms a central part of any

Part-Timers: 11
Store Manager: Cathy Power

Sales Distribution
Sandwich Shop: 40%
Cheese: 20%
Specialty Foods: 20%
Wine: 20%

Sales: While not released, they are estimated by National Association for the Specialty Food Trade to be in the top 100 per square-foot in the United States.

culture; you have only to look at the paintings of the Renaissance, which always have a great big wheel of crumbling cheese in among the figs and pomegranates, to know that cheese is the staff of civilization as well as life."

Walking into the Cheese Shop is an impressive visual and delightful aromatic experience. The focus and shining star of the shop are the more than 200 cheeses displayed daily on the 30 feet of butcher-block counter. All kinds are stacked up on the counter every day of the week. In a couple spots along the counter there are small signs announcing the "cheese of the day." That's "free sample" in college speak, and with their location near The College of William and Mary, many stop in for a daily taste. The turnover is great enough that the cheeses are not refrigerated during display. Therefore, each cheese is handled at least twice each day, and it takes about 1 to 1 1/2 hours each day to set up the display. The Powers also rotate the cheeses they carry using seasonal buying due to limited space.

"They come in to taste and they may not be able to afford a piece that day, but they start to develop an appreciation for good cheese and later they come back," says Mary Ellen.

On the opposite side of the shop is a floor to ceiling built in display that holds more than 2,000 bottles of fine wines. "We have the best wines from around the world with the focus on California and America's up and coming regional vineyards" she says.

The best, however, are not always the highest priced. "We pride ourselves in finding the 'best value' wines, many of these are in the \$6.95 to \$15.00 range," Mary Ellen says. "For decades we have offered wine tasting classes to our customers and our employees after hours in our shop. Wine is the perfect complement to cheese, freshly baked bread, or any meal great or small. Many of the shop's employees are tenured 10, 15 and 25 years. All our
Continued.....

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PASTEURIZATION TASK FORCE UPDATE

By Debra Dickerson

The task force continues its efforts to maintain the rights of cheesemakers, distributors and retailers to produce and sell raw milk cheeses. The last several months have brought significant developments.

We are receiving support from the National Association for the Specialty Food Trade. With its assistance, our position will be a matter of public record at the upcoming CODEX meeting. We continue to work strategically to offer viable alternatives to mandatory pasteurization and to bring our case before the public and policy makers.

The task force has compiled a series of questionnaires, which will be mailed out this month, giving us much needed information about you, our members. This information will provide us with valuable statistics on the effects of mandatory pasteurization on our membership and the economic effects within the industry.

Our relationship with the Vermont Cheese Council also has continued to grow. We continue to support its efforts and work together to combine strategy.



On the international front, we are working to bring representatives from Spain, England, Holland and Italy to our annual conference in Vermont.

While the immediate concern is for the cheeses produced in America, this issue continues to be debated internationally. Working together with cheesemakers in other countries continues.

Questions or comments?

Contact Laura at the ACS administrative office at 414-728-4458.

Reach me directly at 510-524-9325

debradickerson@msn.com



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employees are important and a big part of our success; we appreciate and respect their ability and invaluable contributions. We all encourage customers to taste, learn and experience specialty foods in our shop's intimate and positive environment."

Customer service is more than just talked about because of the staff's desire to share product knowledge with customers. "At least once a week, the Cheese Shop team is actively involved in a new product tasting meeting. We also discuss customers' needs and requests," Mary Ellen says. The shop also is famous for its sandwiches and its very special "house dressing" which is featured regionally in select restaurants and some of the Cheese Shop's own satellite sandwich shops.

Mary Ellen also offers some useful tips for cheesemakers. For example, at their specialty store, the Powers don't require labels but they want as much information as possible on the cheeses that they sell. While always interested in new cheeses, she also stresses that samples should never be sent before calling to see if the store is interested. If the store is interested, please don't send large 20-pound or larger pieces, enough for the small staff is adequate, she says. The Cheese Shop is featuring more and more regional cheeses such as "Monastery Country Cheese" made by Our Lady of the Angels Monastery, a trappist order that supports itself with its handmade Gouda. She says she usually talks with Sister Barbara: (804-

823-1452). Another of the store's regional favorites is the "Gourmet Goat of Virginia," (804-735-8250).

The Cheese Shop's secret appears to be a love for great food, wine and especially cheese. The Powers and their staff have a genuine enjoyment of the customers, many of whom have shopped there sometimes daily for a quarter century. The store now also produces an informative seasonal newsletter.

When asked to complete the following sentence, "I have my best relationships with producers who/when?" Mary Ellen answered, "When I meet them and see them with their cheeses at the ACS annual conference."

Mary says that the annual American Cheese Society Conference is one of her favorites. She calls the conference several intense and stimulating days which further expand her knowledge and give her the opportunity to network with cheesemakers, other retailers and enthusiasts. She states she enjoys meeting the cheesemakers, especially the ones that make the cheeses the Cheese Shop sells. She also appreciates the "Festival of Cheese" at the end of the conference. "We are thrilled to share the excitement of this event with the brilliant winners from over 300 entries," Mary Ellen says.

When I asked her to finish the sentence, "I would like to see more producers?" she replied, "provide information on what goes well with their cheeses in the form of pairings, serving suggestions and simple recipes."

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Provided by the staff at Cheese Market News

March 1-2, 1999: Joint conference between New York State Cheese Manufacturers' Association and Cornell University, Syracuse, N.Y. Contact Janene Lucia, 607-255-2892, FAX 607-255-7619.

March 2, 1999: California Milk Advisory Board California Basics of Cheesemaking Seminar, Visalia, Calif. Contact Nancy Fletcher, California Milk Advisory Board, 400 Oyster Point Boulevard, Suite 214, South San Francisco, CA 94080, 650-871-6455, FAX 650-583-7328.

March 4, 1999: California Milk Advisory Board California Basics of Cheesemaking Seminar, Sacramento, Calif. Contact Nancy Fletcher, California Milk Advisory Board, 400 Oyster Point Boulevard, Suite 214, South San Francisco, CA 94080, 650-871-6455, FAX 650-583-7328.

March 8-11, 1999: 14th Annual Cheesemaking Short Course, Pullman, Washington. Contact Marc Bates, Washington State University Creamery, 509-335-7516, FAX 509-335-5725.

March 9-11, 1999: 1999 U.S. Championship Cheese Contest, Green Bay, Wis. Contact Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association, 608-255-2027, FAX 608-255-4434.

March 10-12, 1999: SmartMarketing, New Orleans. Contact International Dairy Foods Association, 202-737-4332, FAX 202-331-7820.

March 16-19, 1999: Cal Poly/UC-Davis 10th Annual Cheese Short Course I, San Luis Obispo, Calif. Contact Laurie Jacobson, 805-756-6097, FAX 805-756-2998.

March 18, 1999: Cheese Grading - Cheddar and Territorials, Milk Marque Product Development Center, Reaseheath, Natwich, Cheshire England. Contact Chris Ashby 01270 611051 FAX 01270 611013

April 8-10, 1999: Statistical Methods for Sensory Evaluation of Foods, Davis, Calif. Contact David Edgar, 530-757-8812, FAX 530-757-8558.

April 12-14, 1999: Sensory Evaluation: Overview and Update, Davis, Calif. Contact David Edgar, 530-757-8812, FAX 530-757-8558.

April 13-14, 1999: 1999 Wisconsin Cheese Industry Conference, LaCrosse, Wis. Contact Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association, 608-255-2027, FAX 608-255-4434.

April 13 - 15, 1999: Basic Cheesemaking Short Course, Milk Marque Product Development Center, Reaseheath, Natwich, Cheshire England. Contact Chris Ashby 01270 611051 FAX 01270 611013

April 15-26, 1999: World Dairy Expo European Expedition, several locations. Contact Marlene Schmidt, World Dairy Expo, 608-224-6455, FAX 608-224-0300.

April 21-22, 1999: Cal Poly/UC-Davis 6th Annual Milk Processing Technology Short Course, Ontario, Calif. Contact Laurie Jacobson, 805-756-6097, FAX 805-756-2998.

April 22 - 24, 1999 California Cheese and Butter Association Convention, Seascape Resort on Monterey Bay. Contact Rhada Stern 415-380-8230 Fax 415-380-8532

April 27-29, 1999: International Association of Food Industry Suppliers' HTST Workshop Part I, Los Angeles, Calif. Contact Dorothy Brady, 703-761-2600, FAX 703-761-4334.

April 28-30, 1999: Recombined Milk and Milk Products, Penang, Malaysia. Contact Alison Johnson, The Secretariat, 61-3-9742-0117, FAX 61-3-9742-0201.

May 11-12, 1999: Cultured Dairy Products Conference, Milwaukee. Contact International Dairy Foods Association, 202-737-4332, FAX 202-331-7820.

May 15-16, 1999: Getting Started in the Specialty Foods Business, Davis, Calif. Contact David Edgar, 530-757-8812, FAX 530-757-8558.

May 18-20, 1999: Cal Poly/UC-Davis Cheese Short Course II, San Luis Obispo, Calif. Contact Laurie Jacobson, 805-756-6097, FAX 805-756-2998.

June 3-4, 1999: International Prospects for Dairying in the Next WTO Negotiating Round, Buenos Aires, Argentina. Contact Ricardo James, Comité Nacional Argentina de la FIL, 54-1-983-6149, 54-1-983-0587, 54-1-983-1865, FAX 54-1-983-4056.

June 6-8, 1999: IDDBA 1999 Seminar and Expo, New Orleans. Contact International Dairy-Deli-Bakery Association, 608-238-7908, FAX 608-238-6330.

Sept. 9-10, 1999: Marschall Italian and Specialty Cheese Seminar, Santa Clara, Calif. Contact website: www.marshcalliscs.com.

Oct. 28-31, 1999: Worldwide Food Expo '99, Chicago. Contact exhibits department of the International Association of Food Industry Suppliers, 703-761-0900, FAX 703-761-4434, visit the website for the "Worldwide Food Expo" at www.worldwide-food.com, or call the fax-on-demand service at 703-645-9302.

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