

A Taste of Muskoka

Article by Dawn Huddlestone/Photographs by Heather Douglas

Pub food with added flair at Oar & Paddle in Gravenhurst

A new restaurant and pub in Gravenhurst is wowing locals and cottagers alike. Formerly North, a fine dining restaurant, The Oar & Paddle Restaurant and Pub is all about casual comfort both in the food and in the décor.

The stage is set by the row of old oars and paddles lining the patio. Inside, more old paddles grace the walls, distressed wood floors and timber pillars create rustic warmth and church pew booths add an eclectic touch.

Owners Robbie and Alain Irvine wanted to create a year-round eatery that was welcoming for families. "We had some great years with North," says Robbie, "but the fine dining format restricted how much of the year we were open – we closed our doors from January through March every year – and who would come to eat here." They took the North brand down the street with a new storefront for their catering operation.

In February, they launched The Oar & Paddle in North's former location in the heart of Gravenhurst. "There's been a real resurgence in Gravenhurst with people moving back, especially young families. We wanted to work toward the future and create a place where those young families would feel comfortable bringing the kids and where many of our former North customers would want to bring their grandchildren."

Chef Kate Gilbert joined Alain in the kitchen at North in 2013 and it was natural that she would carry on as chef for The Oar & Paddle.

She started cooking at 15 in Muskoka, trained at Georgian College with apprenticeships at Deerhurst and Delta Grandview resorts, and received her Red Seal certification at 21.

"My grandmother and mother were both great cooks," says Gilbert. "They got my brother and I excited about cooking and now we're both chefs." After a seven-year stint working at various restaurants in Calgary, she returned to Muskoka.

Gilbert's goal in creating the menu for The Oar & Paddle was to maintain North's high standards and reputation for great food but with a more casual feel.

"I was inspired to take what most



Chef Kate Gilbert earned her Red Seal certification at age 21. She started cooking at 15.

people think of as pub food and give it some flair," she says. The menu is a unique offering of pub fare influenced by her classical French training.

One of the most popular items on the menu, Southern fried chicken served with corn fritters, mashed yams and white gravy, is a crowd-pleasing favourite.

There's also a wild boar, venison and blueberry burger and a twist on the classic spaghetti and meatballs – papardelle noodles with applewood-smoked meat balls stuffed with olives and mozzarella in a rustic tomato sauce. Both are variations you're not likely to see on other standard pub menus.

She uses the daily specials to play with the fusion between casual and classical. Exotic ingredients like crocodile often make their way onto the specials board.

Gilbert has also carefully created offerings for customers with dietary restrictions. A prime example is the quinoa, chickpea and mushroom cabbage roll with olive and sun-dried tomato tapenade, which is both vegetarian and gluten-free. "We've become famous for that dish. People love it."

As chef, Gilbert's favourite menu



Gilbert prepares a Caesar salad to accompany the quiche. She has added menu items for those with dietary restrictions.



The Caramelized Onion & Roasted Vegetable Quiche with Puff Pastry is a popular item on the Oar & Paddle menu.

item is the beef bourguignon with double-smoked bacon, carrots, onion, mushrooms, fresh herbs and roasted fingerling potatoes. It's an ode to her husband who was also once a chef and taught her how to make the dish.

Almost everything on the menu at The Oar & Paddle is made in-house using the freshest local ingredients where possible.

"None of our dishes are cooked out of a bag," says Gilbert. "Almost everything is made from scratch. Our beef brisket is smoked in-house. We even make most of our desserts." With delicious offerings like the salted caramel crème brûlée, it's an effort the pub's customers appreciate.

The menu changes with the seasons. New offerings for fall include a beet salad with goat cheese, orange segments, gremolata, and an arugula and poached pear and spinach salad with maple walnuts and blue cheese dressing.

"Everything we create is simple food but homey and delicious," she explains. "These are comfort dishes that you wouldn't normally make at home."

The quiche recipe Gilbert has shared is a classic comfort food that's easy to make but will wow guests at your home.

"Using puff pastry gives it a high shell which is great for presentation," she says. "You could also use just the filling to make a frittata instead."

She recommends using prepared

puff pastry for this dish, as they do in the restaurant. It's one of the few ingredients they don't make in-house. "Puff pastry takes three days to make properly!" says Gilbert.

The Oar & Paddle has been getting rave reviews from customers since making the switch to casual dining. "We've heard from our customers that they love the menu, they love the generous portions for the price, and they're pleased that everything is made in-house," she says.

It's also a hit with families. The casual atmosphere and kids' menu make it a great place to dine with children. The restaurant is closed on Sundays, so that staff can spend time with their own families.

The Irvines are also strong believers in supporting the local community. "Part of that is being a year-round employer," says Robbie. "And it's also about partnering with the community and helping to lift up other businesses. We can only be successful if other area businesses are, too."

As for the future, the staff at The Oar & Paddle are embracing their new format and letting it evolve. "Every day is still new," says Robbie. "We had a very successful summer — our customers have been gracious in letting us make this change. It was a huge change but we are so pleased with the result. We'll keep evolving and let the restaurant tell us what it needs."



Memorable...

From first sight to last bite!



Advertise your
dining establishment
and let all of
Muskoka and its visitors
savour the flavour!

MUSKOKA MAGAZINE
705-646-1314



Muskoka

Natural Food Market

"DELI LAMA" VEGETARIAN CAFÉ
& TAKE-OUT

NUTRITIOUS PROTEIN SMOOTHIES
& FRESH VEGETABLE JUICE BLENDS
(MADE TO ORDER)

FRESH LOCAL ORGANIC PRODUCE

GLUTEN FREE SPECIALIST
(BREADS, BUNS & BAKED GOODS MADE IN HOUSE DAILY)

FULL SERVICE HEALTH FOOD STORE
WITH FRIENDLY KNOWLEDGABLE STAFF

NATURAL VITAMIN SUPPLEMENTS

STATE OF THE ART BULK FOOD SECTION

VEGETARIAN CATERING AVAILABLE

BRACEBRIDGE SHOPPING CENTRE
METRO PLAZA HWY 118 WEST
705-645-5471

MON TO THUR 9-6 • FRIDAY 9-7
SAT 9-6 • SUN 11-4

 www.muskokanaturalfoods.wordpress.com  

46 October 2014 www.muskokamagazine.com



At The Oar & Paddle, the distressed wood floors, timber pillars and church pew booths create a warm and welcoming atmosphere with an eclectic touch.

Caramelized Onion & Roasted Vegetable Quiche with Puff Pastry By Chef Kate Gilbert

2 sheets puff pastry
14 whole eggs
2 cups 35 per cent cream
Pinch salt and pepper
1/2 cup Parmesan cheese
1 green zucchini
1/2 eggplant
2 bell peppers (any colour)
1 large Spanish onion
1 tomato
8-10 button mushrooms

Instructions:

1. Preheat oven to 350 F
2. At the Oar & Paddle, I use a spring form pan lined with parchment paper and then line the puff pastry inside. Be sure there are no large holes in the pastry as the egg mixture will leak. To prevent the pastry from rising too much, make small fork holes all the way around.
3. Put another piece of parchment paper inside the puff pastry and fill with raw rice (this will prevent the shell from falling down as it begins to bake). Place the pan on a baking sheet and bake the shell for 12 minutes. Remove the rice and parchment paper and then bake the shell for another 10 minutes. This helps to seal the shell and ensure you have a nice crust when you are finished.
4. Dice the vegetables, removing the seeds from the tomato (cutting the vegetables into larger pieces is okay, too). Heat a tablespoon of oil in a pan and cook the onion over medium heat for five minutes until caramelized. Transfer to a bowl.
5. Place the remaining cut vegetables on a baking sheet, drizzle with oil and salt and pepper, and bake at 350 F until tender.

6. Place all of the cooked vegetables into a bowl and mix and then transfer to your prepared puff pastry shell.

7. In a bowl, whisk the eggs, cream, salt, pepper and cheese together until mixed. Pour the egg mixture over the vegetables in the puff pastry shell. Gently mix the egg mixture and vegetables together so that the vegetables aren't all sitting on the bottom.

8. Bake the quiche in the oven for 60 minutes. Test for doneness by wiggling the pan – if there isn't much movement, it's ready. If there is more than a Jello-like wiggle, it needs to cook longer.

9. Keep quiche in the pan until cooled. Letting it set for at least four hours will make it easier to cut.

YOUR GUIDE TO FINE DINING IN MUSKOKA

Medora Muskoka Cuisine

Medora Muskoka Cuisine wants to help you create those lasting Muskoka summer moments during our exciting inaugural season. Freshly renovated and fully revamped, Medora Muskoka Cuisine is located just outside Port Carling on Highway 118. Our menu is the perfect blend of comfort cottage eating and casual fine dining. Pair one of our delectable menu items with a selection from our unique hand-picked wine list to craft that lasting Muskoka memory and new tradition. Call 705-765-6060 for reservations or visit www.medoramuskoka.com for more information.

Muskoka Natural Food Market

Eating healthy never tasted so good! A deli-styled restaurant, the Deli Lama Vegetarian Cafe offers made-from-scratch, wholesome hearty dishes - healthy salads, rice bowls, pasta dishes, sandwiches, loaves and soups on hand. Many gluten free options available daily. Catering for all occasions, call 705-645-5471.