Ruth's Chris Steak House is sizzling in its spot inside the Mohegan Sun Pocono.

RUTH'S CHRIS HISTORY

Ruth's Chris Steak House got its start in 1965 when Ruth Fertel opened a small steak restaurant in New Orleans. She called it Ruth's Chris Steak House. When a kitchen fire destroyed the restaurant in 1966, Ruth had to relocate the restaurant -- but the name stuck. In 1972, she added her name before it, giving birth to the Ruth's Chris Steak House we know today. In 1977, she granted her first franchise.

Ruth Fertel saw a classified ad for a steak restaurant for sale. A single mom seeking a business opportunity, she bought the restaurant. Ruth's Chris Steak House got its start in 1965 when Ruth Fertel opened a small steak restaurant in New Orleans. She called it Ruth's Chris Steak House. When a kitchen fire destroyed the restaurant in 1966, Ruth had to relocate the restaurant -- but the name stuck. In 1972, she added her name before it, giving birth to the Ruth's Chris Steak House we know today. In 1977, she granted her first franchise.

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RUTH'S CHRIS HISTORY

Ruth's Chris Steak House got its start in 1965 when Ruth Fertel started working at the restaurant. She decided to open her own restaurant after a kitchen fire destroyed the one she was working at. She called it Ruth's Chris Steak House. The restaurant became a success, and Ruth continued to grow her business, opening several other locations. Today, Ruth's Chris Steak House has over 110 locations across the United States.

We were greeted warmly by Sarah, one of the warmest and friendliest hostesses working at the establishment. She showed us to our table, gave us menus and took part in some casual conversations. Our next visitor was Dustin, our waiter, who was very friendly and engaging. He said he was very familiar with the restaurant and that he had been working there for a long time.

Ruth's Chris Steak House, the inside-out steak restaurant with an unparalleled reputation, a tongue-twitching name, and a menu offering for every steak lover. Dustin quickly brought the wine and dessert menus, so I glanced at the slot machines, but I really had only two things on my mind: Ruth's Chris Steak House and Nick Amthor's in Akron, Ohio, where I grew up. Chart House in Southern California, where I lived for five years. Shula's Steak House in South Florida, a region I've visited several times. And now Ruth's Chris in the Wilkes-Barre area. I have a fascination with upscale steakhouses, so I'd always wanted to try Ruth's Chris, which specializes in USDA Prime Midwestern steaks.

When we arrived at the restaurant, we were greeted by a hostess who showed us to our table. We were seated in a beautiful dining area with a growing wall of wine bottles lined up. There were so many, in fact, that they created a sense of intimacy. We started our evening at Ruth's Chris by trying the appetizers.

As we got up to leave, we thanked Mark, our waiter, and covered in a delicious sauce. My wife said -- serving that was unlike any chicken breast I've ever had. -- work, home improvement, our extended families. -- work, home improvement, our extended families. -- work, home improvement, our extended families.

This filet lived up to its billing and ranks as one of the best I've ever had. And the spinach artichoke dip was a perfect side dish. The mashed potatoes were the crowning glory of our meal, and the warm bread was a delightful surprise.

The lighting was warm and inviting, and the ambiance was perfect for a romantic evening. The staff was friendly and attentive, and the service was top-notch. The food was delicious, and the atmosphere was cozy and comfortable.

We capped the evening with two drinks, a perfect end to a perfect evening. We left the restaurant feeling satisfied and happy, and we knew we would be back soon for another wonderful meal at Ruth's Chris Steak House.
The Vault Grill & Bar

History and Excellent Dining Meet in Downtown Wilkes-Barre

WILKES-BARRE - You step back into a grandeur time when you enter The Vault Grill & Bar. The upscale restaurant features some of the original decor from the historic Wyoming National Bank Building located on 24 W. Market St. (the corner of Franklin and Market Street) in Wilkes-Barre. Most notably, the original bank vault from which they take their name. A perfect balance between classic and classy.

Entering the restaurant, we were greeted by Dan and the friendly wait staff. The table was beautifully laid out with the finest china and linens. As we learned throughout the evening, attention to detail is a focus at The Vault. Head chef Benito Albanesi came to our table and described some of our menu options in vivid detail. It was obvious that Chef Benito was equally passionate and knowledgeable about his craft. He told us about his career, earning his Master's in Italy before embarking on a 37-year trek as a chef. Most recently, he was the Executive Chef at the Blackstone in New York.

Time finally came to order. I was looking forward to the seafood while my dining companion had decided on the steak. He complimented our dining choice with a wide array of seafood delights. The first appetizer was shrimp, crab cakes and scallops, which included avocado. This was the best crab cake that I have ever tasted. The shrimp and scallops, lightly drizzled with a raspberry glaze, would be fine entrees on their own. The second appetizer was Beets Napoleon with smoked salmon and shrimp with roasted red pepper, Mozzarella cheese and a balsamic reduction. Beautifully laid out, the mozzarella was out of this world.

For the entree, I had chosen baked Norwegian salmon. The fish was cooked to the utmost perfection, and it melted in my mouth. My dinner companion had chosen the strip steak, and the portions were extremely generous. The entire plate was filled. No matter what entree you choose, you’ll be getting every penny’s worth. The strip steak was cooked ideally, seared on top and bottom, with a seasoning that sealed in the succulent flavor.

For dessert, Chef Benito came out with some homemade cheesecake decorated with dark chocolate and a lovely strawberry that was in the shape of a rose. Very impressive. My dining companion enjoyed the creme brulee, which was delicious. Finishing with a macchiato, it was the perfect end to a perfect meal.

It was a delightful evening, and I am excited to dine in this restaurant again in the near future. This makes a great place to have a special event or just a night out on the town.

Lunch is served Monday through Friday and dinner is served Monday through Saturday. The Vault Grill & Bar features a variety of menu selections, but the restaurant is known for its upscale steakhouse.

APPETIZERS

SALADS

SOUPS

ENTREES

BURGERS

SIDES

EXTENSIVE WINE MENU

FABULOUS BAR

Welcome to Vault Grill and Bar
IN HISTORIC DOWNTOWN WILKES-BARRE

OUR MENU FEATURES

FOR RESERVATIONS, PLEASE CALL 570-371-3900

24 WEST MARKET STREET WILKES-BARRE, PA 18701
WWW.VAULTGRILLANDBAR.COM
Oyster Restaurant
A True Pearl in The City of Wilkes-Barre

Each city has its hidden gem that gives you a whole new sense of appreciation and outlook on that city once you discover it. For me, the gem I have discovered is the Oyster Restaurant, located in the Genetti Hotel in downtown Wilkes-Barre.

Ever since I was a child, I was always under the impression that the Genetti Hotel had a sense of class and elegance to it, but I truly had no idea how true that really was until my wife and I stepped into its doors on a recent Friday night.

Before you enter the restaurant itself, there is a lobby where you wait to be seated...I must say that this is one restaurant that you certainly will not mind waiting in line for! The whole room was ornately decorated to resemble an era from years ago. From the vintage leather chairs, stocked bar, and the nostalgic neon oyster sign...you’d swear that you were instantly transported to the holidays when I tasted this.

It tasted like dinner and dessert combined into one decadent treat, and it was somehow even better than the sausage before it. “I don’t think we’re going to have room for dinner” I said to my wife and I tried this, we could not stop! We hadn’t even finished our other appetizers yet but we made it our top priority to devour that crab cake, and we accomplished our mission!

At this point we were positively stuffed...there was no way for more food, but then the smell of steak and eggplant entered the room and we knew we had to find some way within ourselves to make way for what followed! My steak was served with mashed potatoes and grilled zucchini and my wife was served a giant dish of eggplant topped with a spicy pasta sauce and served with a side of pasta. We both could not believe how huge the portions were...but this was certainly a great problem to have!

The steak was absolutely perfect. It was juicy and cooked to medium rare, which is just how I like it! What really brought out the explosive flavor of this was eating a bite of the zucchini, steak and potato at the same time! My wife said her eggplant was some of the best she had ever tasted!

As we struggled we eat the remainder of our incredible meal...the waitress approached us and asked if we had room for dinner. At this point my wife and I looked at each other and then the waiters and we all laughed! At this point we didn’t care how full we were...it was time for dessert and we were ready!

The waitress brought out creme brûlée for myself and mini chocolate cake for my wife. I have never had creme brûlée, but I have to say I’m glad I did! It almost tasted like a high-class candied version of flan. It had a sweet, crunchy exterior with a hint of cinnamon and a soft, warm interior that was absolutely decadent! The dessert was also served with whipped cream on the side, which really helped bring out its true flavor potential! Me being a chocoholic, I could not help myself from trying some of my wife’s chocolate cake...which was phenomenal! I actually had to stop myself from eating the cake before I ate all of it!

As we sat with our stomachs full...the only thing my wife and I thought about was how beautiful the evening was. We have two children at home, and just getting a chance to be on a date is amazing let alone getting to go to such a place as Oyster. The whole experience was reminiscent of the kinds of restaurants we used to go to together at the resort we spent our honeymoon at in Mexico. The nostalgia of it all caused us to fall in love all over again and created a memory that we would never forget. The Oyster Restaurant is something I’d recommend to all couples who are looking for a romantic night of high class and happiness.

My wife and I plan to attend again around the holidays to see what they do for Christmas, and I highly suggest you do too!
Le Manhattan Bistro
Celebrating 3rd Anniversary in downtown Wilkes-Barre!

WILKES-BARRE – For those who have been to Le Manhattan Bistro, you already know the food is phenomenal and prepared and served by restaurant owners Chef Gwenaël Le Pape (“Chef Gwen”), Jean-Baptiste Moreau and their team. The two met over 17 years ago at L’Orange Bleue in New York City, and they merged their chef and front-end restaurant talents to bring Le Manhattan Bistro to Wilkes-Barre as a one-of-a-kind eatery in the area.

This review is written to inspire those who have not been a guest at this unique bistro. It’s a beautifully designed restaurant, but if you think it’s a “fancy French restaurant,” it really doesn’t have that stigma. You don’t have to wear a suit or sport coat or think that you need to dress up. You can, but it isn’t a requirement or what you normally see. You also may think, “I’m not sure I like French food.”

Don’t worry about that. The menu is so varied that even the pickiest eater (me) found plenty of choices I adored, and yes, they are prepared with a French technique and style. Le Manhattan Bistro is on South Main Street at the corner of Ross Street, a site that includes off-street parking. Le Pape and Moreau opened the restaurant on Oct. 14, 2014. Happy third anniversary! The exquisite banking building is over 100 years old and offers the charm of the old bank vault: beautiful wood features and extremely high ceilings. The decor is elegantly restored in the spirit of a French bistro. And it’s the only French restaurant within a 60-mile radius.

Upon arrival, we were greeted directly by Chef Gwen. Regular guests can expect to see him often during dinner. He might even sit down and talk about your experience, which is the best local customer service I’ve ever seen. (Check out the Chef’s profile below.) His education and experience are astounding, and he’ll also tell you about some celebrities he’s met and cooked for.

Ask him about John McEnroe and the US Open or working with Anthony Bourdain. Chef Gwen also won the episode called “Make No Mistake” on the Food Network’s Chopped in 2013. That’s a great story!

First, we reviewed an outstanding wine list. Whether you enjoy a crisp white or a bold red, there are many to choose from. Chef Gwen personally tastes all the varietals he serves to those who have been to Le Manhattan Bistro offers a Sunday brunch from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. They offer a believable food selection. All this and Chef Gwen, a gentleman and a personality all his own. We’re sold. We’ll be back sooner than you can say, “Bon Appétit.”

Notable: While we were dining, we learned that Le Manhattan Bistro offers a Sunday Brunch from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. They offer a full menu, plus such great brunch favorites as French toast, crepes and multiple Eggs Benedict choices.

Chef Spotlight
Chef Gwenaël Le Pape or Chef Gwen’s culinary background, experience, and world travels have led to the wonderful restaurant and menu you will find at the authentic French restaurant Le Manhattan Bistro in Wilkes-Barre. He studied in France at College Rene Guy Cadou and the Culinary Institute Sainte-Anne.

Some of Chef Gwen’s accomplishments include (but are not limited to) write-ups and accolades in New York Times, Daily News, New York Post, Washington Post, Time Magazine, New Yorker, Conde Nast, and many more. Le Manhattan Bistro was awarded for Best New Restaurant by local newspapers. He won “Chopped” episode named “Make No Mistake,” Food Network 2013.

Chef Gwen spent some time working in New York City restaurants such as Les Deux Gamins, Jean-Georges, L’Orange Bleue, Dango, Les Halles Group, The Porter Group, Le Bilboquet, La Goulue, and The Kimberly. He also spent time in France at Lapostolle Besancon, L’Hermitage, La Boulangerie in St. Quentin, London.

Chef Gwen also has two boys, Yotam, 11 and Emile, 15.
Marianacci’s Restaurant

WEST WYOMING - On a recent evening, I became really hungry for good, homemade Italian food, and therefore decided to go to Marianacci’s in West Wyoming. This was not only a good choice – It was a great one! A mistreatrue in West Wyoming (just over the tracks) for over 45 years, Marianacci’s is a family run and a neighborhood comfort spot with some incredible Italian food. Upon exiting my car, the aroma engulfed my senses and I was ready to be fed. My dinner guest and I were pleasantly greeted and seated by Gina, daughter of co-owner Fred Marianacci. Fred and his brother Nick are the foundation of what their parents Dominick and Blodwyn Marianacci began to build years ago.

Soon after being seated, we were promptly asked our drink preference. Though the variety and selection of drinks is vast, we both chose simplicity; I had a glass of water while my guest drank iced tea. The iced tea was one of the best we have ever tasted! It was obvious that it was freshly brewed and very good!

As we were studying the mouth-watering, very inviting and easy to maneuver menu, Gina brought out some bread to begin our evening. By this time, our palates were ready for some Italian fare. We had a fabulous choice of appetizers and settled on clams bianco, consisting of a dozen clams drenched in a white wine, olive oil, Romano cheese and garlic sauce. The clams were tasty and tender, and the sauce enhanced them immensely.

The other appetizer we chose was fried calamari, which was, by far, the best we have ever eaten. A generous portion of perfectly fried calamari melted in our mouths, served with a side of homemade marinara sauce that was delicious!

Picking an entree was again a difficult decision. As I was studying the menu, I also noted that Marianacci’s offers midweek specials from Monday through Thursday. I finally decided upon the Italian sampler, one of the Wednesday specials. This sampler included a selection of Italy’s best, which included lasagna, spinach gnocchi, two meat and two cheese ravioli, all served with some of the best homemade sauce I have tasted. Soup or salad is offered with each entree, and I chose the salad with a wonderful homemade house Italian dressing. The salad greens were crisp and fresh and served with homemade croutons!

My partner chose to select a dinner from the regular menu – and chose veal parmesan.

The dinner was served with tasty and generous portions of lightly breaded veal, a side of homemade angel hair pasta and topped with an incredibly moist meatball, all smothered in their signature homemade marinara sauce. The veal was tender and the pasta was delicious!

Rather than a salad, French Onion Soup was the choice by my partner. The onion soup came out in a crock, served with a generous amount of onions, homemade croutons, wonderful broth and topped with melted cheese. Marianacci’s French Onion Soup was incredibly delicious and superior to any we have ever tasted.

Did someone say dessert? When we were finished with our dinner, Gina asked if we were interested in dessert. All desserts are homemade by Fred’s wife, Patty – and the selection was great! Pies of all types were offered, which included blueberry or cherry pie, banana cream pie and peanut butter pie! What really got our attention though was a piece of Cannoli Pie. The Cannoli Pie is exactly what it sounds like, consisting of a flaky shortbread crust, creamy and light filling, sprinkled with chopped walnuts and topped with fresh homemade whipped cream. My dreams of the perfect pie had finally come true! It was delectable!

The dinner was superior to any we have ever tasted. The evening was wonderful! Marianacci’s Restaurant certainly has an atmosphere that embraces a homey warmth with a very inviting and comfortable atmosphere. They treat you as though you are part of their family and you feel as though you have been invited into their home for dinner. Every structure has a foundation, and it is obvious that the foundation and structure of this business is family, built many years ago and has remained intact! Along with brothers Fred and Nick, Fred’s wife Patty makes all the desserts and Gina and Alissa (Nick’s daughter) work in the restaurant. Nick’s son, Dominic, is a Certified Sommelier, and schedules monthly wine pairing events. Marianacci’s also serves lunch Monday through Saturday, and also sells their homemade pasta and sauces to take home with you. Their pasta and gnocchi are homemade, hand-made and delicious! Their beautiful bar area is adorned with a variety of sports memorabilia and is welcoming to both the sports enthusiast and those who just want to enjoy a night out.

End of text.
Co-owners Donna Bettelli and Jessica Sheehan
Head Chef Jeff Kochanski

Bettelli's Cafe
Tradition Ripe at Longtime Italian Eatery

Wild caught salmon over tri-color quinoa

The wild-caught salmon over tri-color quinoa was served with a tasty maple bacon reduction, fresh-shaved celery and apple, with Allumettes sweet potatoes. The portions were generous enough that we were able to take two boxes home, which were finished for lunch the following Sunday.

My dining pal and I were especially pleased to know that most of the foods are purchased locally at places such as City-Mager and the Wilkes-Barre farmer’s market, since Sheehan is a big proponent of supporting local business over chains when possible.

Just when we thought we’d had enough, between the pizza, entrees and large glasses of wine (my dining pal eventually switched from gin to a sweet Riesling), we were full. Not so fast, however, as waitress Amanda and Sheehan energetically wanted to show us a dessert favorite. Out came a tiny pumpkin mascarpone in a graham-cracker crust with whip cream that was nothing short of delightful.

As we finished up and attempted to walk to the front of the restaurant from our intimate, corner booth, we saw many familiar Wyoming Valley faces with whom we exchanged pleasantries.

Some of the folks there, Sheehan explained, were coming to dine when Sheehan was a young girl bus- ing tables, and now the next generation of their families are coming in as well.

They, like Sheehan’s family, have embraced the Bettelli’s tradition.

Sheehan describes these days as a member of the fourth generation taking over the helm “under mom’s watchful eye,” she said smiling, adding that mom Donna will always be a presence.

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And while both Sheen and Postupak miss the magic that en- compassed Postupak’s mother, Pauline Bettelli, they said her spirit is always felt.

Sheehan says they honor the traditions of her grandmother and where she came from, while also remembering her adventurous ways and love of travel and food.

“We love the industry, and we just want to share what we do well and work so hard for,” said the humble and energetic Sheehan as the evening came to a close.
We’ll meet you tonight at

RUTH’S CHRIS STEAK HOUSE

Lunch- open 7 days a week!
Happy Hour Sunday through Friday 4:30 pm – 6:30 pm,
Saturday 9:30 – 11:30 pm
Bistro Menu Available all week in our bar & lounge
Live music – 6 days a week!
Private Dining Rooms available

Prime Cut Steaks – Chops – Seafood – Sides – Desserts
We have a large and unique wine list for every palate!

Grico’s
Classic Cuisine & Catering

Classic Italian dishes, steak, seafood
Monday - Saturday | 5 - 10pm
– Celebrating 82 years of good taste –

Any Occasion Catering
- Weddings
- Bar/Bat Mitzvahs
- Private Parties
- Showers
- Family Celebrations
- Graduations
- Holiday Dinners
- First Communions
- Christenings
- Cocktail parties
- Golf Tournaments
- Claim bakes and picnics

In-House Luncheons & Private Parties
- Are you looking for an intimate place to hold a private event?
- Larger rooms can accommodate up to 40 people, and our private room seats up to 30 guests.
- Private Parties
- Rehearsal Dinners
- Showers
- Bereavement Luncheons

Corporate Catering
- Whether it’s a simple weekly sales staff luncheon of sandwiches and salad, or a hot buffet for a quarterly meeting, Grico’s can provide catering for any occasion.
- Corporate parties off premise or on premise, full service or drop off, we’ve got you covered.

Moeneg Sun Pocono, 1280 Highway 315, Wilkes-Barre, PA 18702, 570-208-2266
Lunch: Open Daily at 12:00 pm
Dinner Hours: Mon - Wed 12 - 10 pm Thu 12 - 11 pm Fri - Sat 12 pm - 12:30 am
Sun 12 - 10 pm

Locally Owned by Metz Culinary Management, Dallas, Pa
Grico’s Restaurant
A Unique Dining Experience and So Close!

Boneless Delmonico steak
EXETER - I hadn’t been to Grico’s for many years because I live a little outside the Wyoming Valley cities, but on a recent Monday night my friend and I drove 10 minutes from downtown Wilkes-Barre to enjoy the unique dining experience that the restaurant offers.

Grico’s is situated in a beautiful older home on Wyoming Avenue, Exeter. It’s been a restaurant for over 80 years, originally owned by the Grico family. Rob Friedman bought the business in 2016 and is the current owner. He also owns other local restaurants Cork in Wilkes-Barre and the Beaumont Inn in Dallas.

The beautiful bar room area is home to a vintage 1930s bar salvaged from Brooklyn, NY. The woodwork is exquisite. The bar room boasts a lot of bar seats and tables. We were surprised to find quite the regular crowd on a Monday evening. It certainly was a pleasure to see so many local friends enjoying their drinks, meals and talking with the friendly staff.

Grico’s has a full dining area in the restaurant as well as private dining booths toward the back that are perfect for a special date night, occasion or even a business meeting. The booths can seat two to eight people. Just call ahead to reserve one so you aren’t disappointed if it isn’t available on short notice.

We were fortunate to be able to sit in a private booth. The table was set beautifully, complete with wine glasses, water glasses and candles. The booth included a buzzer to alert the staff, but in our case, it wasn’t necessary. AJ, Olivia and Bruce, who waited on us throughout the evening, were on top of their game, making sure our experience was pleasant. And it was!!! Of course, on a Monday after “a typical work Monday,” my friend and I wanted to enjoy a cocktail. Grico’s offered a great variety of Martinis, Dessert Martinis, Specialty Cocktails, and a great selection of wines and beers.

I chose a St. Michelle Riesling, and my friend chose a Paso Creek Cabernet. Both wines hit the spot. On the appetizer menu, Grico’s offers a unique assortment of choices, and we ordered two recommended favorites: Eggplant Fritti and Fresh Clams.

The Eggplant Fritti was delicious and a surprise delight. It had two larger pieces of crispy panko-crusted eggplant piled high with mozzarella and tomatoes. I had to take some home because I wanted to enjoy my entrée.

The dozen little neck clams were done to perfection, served with plenty of white wine and garlic sauce. Not only were they tasty, but they almost melted in your mouth. Far from chewing than enjoying.

The entrée menu boasted several special choices. From pastas and fabulous grill items to special sautés and seasonal dishes, we had a hard time deciding. We chose the Blackened Filet of Salmon with lime raspberry sauce and The Prince, a 16-ounce boneless Delmonico steak.

It’s important to note that we were served nicely made salads with a delicious homemade parmesan peppercorn dressing that was a perfect mild blend. So many restaurants offer a bold flavor dressing that is unappealing after you’ve eaten all the food.

The entrees arrived, and we were taken a back by the amount of food and the wonderful presentation. The salmon was cooked perfectly; it came apart with the slightest touch of the fork. The lime raspberry sauce was sweet but not overpowering. My friend waved his fork and said “excellent.”

The Prince Delmonico was served covering the plate with a Pepe sauce made of mushrooms, brandy and cream. I was delighted because I don’t believe I’ve had a similar sauce anywhere locally. It was a perfect complement to the large steak, which was prepared to my perfect temperature of medium well. It was tender, with a black pepper crust. It was simply a joy to eat.

Although Grico’s offered a variety of decadent desserts, my friend and I both chose the Apple Crip with caramel, cinnamon and vanilla ice cream. This time of year, what more could you ask for? We typically don’t order dessert at dinner, but this apple treat was a great ending to the special meal we had. It was superb, and I can’t stop thinking about it.

Thank you Grico’s for a special evening. Your courteous, attentive staff were warm and inviting. Your signature dishes were outstanding and your atmosphere unbeatable. We will see you again soon.

DALLAS - We chose The Beaumont Inn at the end of a long work week. It was a beautiful fall evening, and we were ready to enjoy a great meal in a scenic setting.

We knew we were in for a treat from the reviews we read in our Distinctive Palate edition last spring. The unique part of The Beaumont is that they design entrees consistent with the season, and it was perfect timing for our fall visit.

We were seated right at fireside. Dimmed lights and fire light made it enjoyable for us to review the extensive wine list and menu. The Beaumont folks are very knowledgeable about wine, and their restaurant offers a great selection of wines and beers. We knew we were in for a treat from the reviews we read in our Distinctive Palate edition last spring.

The Beaumont Inn
A Perfect Fall Dinner, Fireside

Wine Dinner
1st Wednesday of every month
Seven Course Dinner Reservations Required

Join us for Thanksgiving Dinner from 1PM - 7PM
Special Holiday Menu | Reservations Required

Caicos
call ahead to reserve one so you aren’t disappointed if it isn’t available on short notice.

We were fortunate to be able to sit in a private booth. The table was set beautifully, complete with wine glasses, water glasses and candles. The booth included a buzzer to alert the staff, but in our case, it wasn’t necessary. AJ, Olivia and Bruce, who waited on us throughout the evening, were on top of their game, making sure our experience was pleasant. And it was!!! Of course, on a Monday after “a typical work Monday,” my friend and I wanted to enjoy a cocktail. Grico’s offered a great variety of Martinis, Dessert Martinis, Specialty Cocktails, and a great selection of wines and beers.

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BYOB restaurants expand customer possibilities

Dining out is a luxury that many people enjoy one or more times a week. In addition to enjoying the cuisine, many patrons are lifting their glasses in a cost-saving trend.

The BYOB movement, which can refer to “bring your own bottle,” “bring your own garlic,” “bring your own beverage,” used to be limited to dining establishments without permits to sell liquor. Nowadays, many restaurants promote BYOB so their customers can feel more comfortable and customize their experiences even further.

BYOB traces its origins to strict liquor laws and high taxation that can make acquiring liquor licenses prohibitive for some establishments. In New Jersey, for example, such licenses may cost business owners more than $1 million. Price tags can be similar elsewhere, like nearby Philadelphia. In the mid-1990s, BYOB operations were few and far between in the City of Brotherly Love. Now, according to a report from the Independent Hotel, BYOB restaurants are far more common. Restaurants in cities that are close to areas with vineyards, such as San Francisco, which is a stone’s throw from the famed Napa Valley region, have long encouraged diners to bring their own bottles of wine.

BYOB stipulations also vary from restaurant to restaurant. While toting in a favorite bottle of wine can affect restaurants’ profits and create potentially uncomfortable situations for customers.

Since the markup of wine and other spirited beverages can be as high as 400 percent, BYOB is cost-effective, even when corkage fees are considered. Plus, in an ever-changing economy, BYOB offers restaurateurs yet another way to entice budget-conscious customers.

And the BYOB phenomenon has served as a catalyst for innovation. There are web-based guides to finding BYOB restaurants nearby. Plus, wine purse and bag designers are increasingly creating stylish ways to tote beverages to tables.

Bring your own beverages remains a popular trend in dining out, helping diners save money and helping restaurant owners drum up business.

BYOB stipulations also vary from restaurant to restaurant. While toting in a favorite bottle of wine can affect restaurants’ profits and create potentially uncomfortable situations for customers.

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Distinctive Palate

Mirakuya Japanese Restaurant

WILKES-BARRE – As we walked into Mirakuya Japanese Restaurant on a recent Tuesday evening, one of the first things I noticed was the amount of Readers’ Choice awards on the walls in the entryway. It was evident to me immediately that this was going to be a wonderful experience. We were greeted by Steve, the manager, who asked if we were looking for a hibachi or a regular table. Looking for a fun experience and food freshly prepared in front of us, we chose the hibachi.

We immediately were seated at one of the six hibachi grills (one is in the “private party room”) and then greeted by Misty, our server. We both were given the drink and food menus which we looked at while Misty poured us water, served with extra lemon, of course. Misty was attentive to us in all areas — from refilling our water glasses, to bringing us extra napkins, to removing our used plates promptly.

It was a warm evening, and the thought of a Margarita sounded great; therefore, we both chose one — but we each selected something different. Mine was a 24K Gold Rita, which consisted of Premium Tequila, Cointreau, Grand Marnier and Margarita Mix; while my dinner guest chose a Peach Rita, comprised of Tequila, Peachtree Schnapps, Orange Juice and Margarita Mix. They both came out quickly and were served in a very large glass. Delightful and refreshing!

Misty asked if we had any questions about the menu, then inquired if we were interested in appetizers and if we were ready to order dinner. She informed us that appetizers are free on Tuesdays with the purchase of two dinners. (Was beginning to understand why Mirakuya has won so many awards.)

We then placed our order for our appetizers and dinner. For the first round, I ordered Chicken Maki, a delectable deep-fried chicken with crabmeat, cream cheese, asparagus and carrots wrapped within. This was served with a dipping sauce that was wonderful. I could have made a meal on these delicious choices alone. I ate slowly so I could savor the flavor of this incredible appetizer.

My guest chose Edamame for her appetizer. The steamed soybeans came out on a plate and were done to perfection and topped with sea salt.

We also tried Vegetable Harumaki, which are fried, Japanese-style mini spring rolls served with a Japanese dipping sauce. An absolute delight to the palate. (Those awards definitely were won for a reason.)

As we were eating our appetizers, Misty brought out Miso Soup and salad. The soup was smooth and tasted perfect. The salad was crisp and had just the right amount of ginger dressing. Absolutely delicious.

The steamed soybeans came out on a plate and were done to perfection and topped with sea salt.

We then saw our chef coming out with our food — ready to prepare it in front of us. My guest had chosen the Chicken and Filet Mignon combination with noodles, while I had selected the Shrimp and Scallops combination with rice. We found out our chef’s name was Chris, and he had been a chef for approximately 15 years, spending time in Washington D.C., Maryland and Connecticut before coming to Northeastern Pennsylvania. Chris made this experience fun, and the food was amazing.

Our dinner began with Sake – “More Happy!” is what Chris stated throughout his display and perfection of cooking while also spilling the sake into our open mouths. As he continued to put on his unique and entertaining performance of chopping vegetables, lighting an onion “volcano” and flipping vegetables toward our open mouths, we were being teased for our main course.

The noodles and rice were done first, followed by vegetables consisting of broccoli, zucchini, onions and mushrooms, and then the meats and seafood. The vegetables were tasty and fresh, and the rice and noodles were great.

The Filet Mignon melted in your mouth, the chicken was phenomenal, and the shrimp and scallops were scrumptious. Chris also gave each of us two small bowls, each filled with sauces for dipping both the seafood and meats. He explained to us that the darker dipping sauce usually is used for steaks, while the lighter one is a sweeter, ginger-based sauce meant for seafood. He also had stated that people refer to that sauce as “yum-yum sauce” and sometimes buy it separately to take home.

(Chris stated to us that there were 11 well-deserved, Readers’ Choice Awards on that wall)

Once Chris was finished, we ate slowly and took our time. We never felt rushed, and Misty was nearby at all times if we needed anything. We also learned that Sake isn’t just for drinking – it’s one of the key ingredients in almost all the foods made as well. The amount of food prepared allowed us to take leftovers home and enjoy them the next day.

While there, many others were enjoying their dinners, too, both at hibachis and regular tables. People were seated at the sushi bar and throughout the restaurant.

The experience at Mirakuya was one to be remembered for a long time. It is a restaurant that I would suggest to anyone who wants an incredible meal, entertaining evening, and wonderfully attentive staff.

They were truly amazing. The restaurant is open daily for lunch and dinner, and reservations usually are suggested because they get so busy.

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Chicken and filet hibachi
Shrimp and scallops hibachi
Chicken broccoli alfredo

Another one of my guests had the salad with French dressing and the land and sea scallops, shrimp, scallops and chicken in a garlic butter wine sauce and chose the risotto as a starch. The scallops and shrimp were cooked perfectly, as was the chicken. A perfect combination, and the sauce was full of flavor; the salad was topped with Italian dressing. The other dish was chicken broccoli Alfredo; she chose angel hair pasta.

The chicken was cut and tender, with fresh broccoli in a creamy cheese sauce. In stead of a salad, she had the Italian wedding soup -- tiny pearl pasta in a delicious broth with sausage meatballs.

The last dish was the special flatbread skewers with zucchini peppers, onions and butternut squash on top of a creamy risotto. The flatbread was tender and delicious. The vegetables were grilled and fresh. The risotto was creamy and delicious. The salad had balsamic vinaigrette.

All of these dishes were generous portions and reasonably priced. Our waitress was very attentive and friendly. I’m looking forward to going back to try more specials.

The owner, Joe Tomasino, came from Italy and definitely knows his food.

DALLAS – We had reservations for 8:30 at Tomasino’s and were greeted by our waitress, who seated us. She brought us a pitcher of water and the soup of the day.

Our menu came with the special features; everything looked so good it was hard to decide. We started with risotto balls, mozzarella sticks, loaded potato skins and beet salad with goat cheese.

The risotto balls are always a hit; risotto with broccoli and cheese in a creamy Alfredo sauce. The loaded potato skins were filled with bacon, mozzarella, red peppers and cheddar cheese, and they were heavenly. The mozzarella sticks were triangles that were breading fried and then served with a marinara sauce so delicious you could eat out of the dish.

The beets and goat cheese salad was out of this world. The cheese was very creamy and went perfectly with the herb blend of greens with cucumbers, tomatoes, balsamic glaze and croutons.

Our waitress brought us rolls that were warm and fresh. I ordered the special of stuffed calamari; two large calamari filled with toasted bread crumbs, herbs and Romano cheese. I had it with penne pasta and fra diavolo sauce. The sauce was fantastic — just the right amount of heat and full of flavor. The calamari was cooked to perfection.

My guest ordered the crab pic pic, which is crab and risotto with tomatoes in a garlic butter sauce. The risotto was cooked perfectly and was full of crab.

Another one of my guests had the salad with French dressing and the land and sea scallops, shrimp, scallops and chicken in a garlic butter wine sauce and chose the risotto as a starch. The scallops and shrimp were cooked perfectly, as was the chicken. A perfect combination, and the sauce was full of flavor; the salad was topped with Italian dressing. The other dish was chicken broccoli Alfredo; she chose angel hair pasta.

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Make the most of ‘dinner and a movie’ night

The “perfect date night” differs depending on the couple. Some couples might prefer a night on the town during which they get dolled up and visit a five-star restaurant, while others might find a laid-back night at home makes for the ideal night for two.

Dinner and a movie has long been a go-to for couples who prefer something short of a fancy night out but more extravagant than a relaxing night at home. While making plans to dine out and catch a movie is not complicated, there are some things couples can do to make sure such nights go off without a hitch.

• Make a dinner reservation. If you’re going out on a Friday or Saturday night, be sure to make a dinner reservation in advance. Chances are strong other couples have similar plans and you don’t want to miss the movie because you were stuck waiting for a table at the restaurant.

Dinner and a movie nights tend to be impromptu, but make a reservation a few nights in advance if you’re planning on going out on a popular date night.

• Leave ample time between dinner and the start of the movie so you get to the theater early enough to get good seats.

• Be impromptu, but make a reservation a few nights in advance if you’re planning on going out on a popular date night.

• Leave ample time between dinner and the start of the movie. No one wants to rush through a meal, especially couples who may not get too many chances to dine out and enjoy each other’s conversation. If your movie begins at 9 p.m., make a dinner reservation for 6 or 6:30 so you have ample time to eat, enjoy each other’s company and make it to the theater on time. If you’re planning on seeing a highly anticipated movie on its opening weekend, be sure to leave enough time between dinner and the start of the movie so you can get to the theater early enough to get good seats.

• Buy your movie tickets in advance. Much like you want to make a dinner reservation so you can get a table, you also want to buy your tickets in advance so you aren’t shut out if the theater sells out. If you’re worried about committing to the movie too far in advance and want to wait to buy tickets, choose a fallback movie to see in case the film you were hoping to see sells out before you can buy tickets.

• Know the addresses of nearby theaters and show times. Many a couple has arrived at a movie theater, only to find the movie they planned to see is sold out. Oftentimes, such letdowns can be remedied by driving to another theater nearby that is showing the movie at a slightly later time than the initial theater the couple visited.

Know your movie schedules and theater addresses so you have options should your movie be sold out. Download an app like Fandango on your phone so you don’t waste precious time trying to find show times and addresses on the Internet.

Dinner and a movie is a staple for couples’ date nights, and there are some tricks of the trade couples can employ to ensure their next date night is memorable for all the right reasons.
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The Café: An American Bistro

As for the dinner selections, my friend and I both agreed it was going to be a tough choice. The menu features various sections: beef and veal, poultry and seafood, pasta, risotto and so much more. All displayed meticulous, mouth-watering descriptions that proved so enticing it took us more than 20 minutes to make a decision.

Finally, I settled upon the Glazed Duck, a dish that sounded different and unique, and surely not something I eat on the regular. This boneless breast of duckling was served Asian style in a spiced Thai glaze and garnished with deep-fried vegetable spring rolls, cashews and green onion. As if the entrée wasn’t generous enough, it came with a tasty side of potato garlic mashed potatoes, green beans, carrots and zucchini.

For drinks, we were in the mood for something potent so the beer list (made up of craft and domestics) and specialty cocktail offerings (everything from the Café Cosmo and Lemon Drop Martini to the Café Signature Long Island and Margarita Martini) are where our eyes wandered first as we began mulling our many options of the night.

For drinks, we were in the mood for something potent so I decided to spend Tuesday evening at this modern, family-owned restaurant that’s been satisfying locals’ palates for more than two decades. On this particular night, owner Jeff Woytowich made his way between two private parties, the full-service bar and the dimly lit dining room to ensure all facets of the operation were running smoothly. Indeed they were.

Decorated in vibrant white and black lacquer photos with dangling pendant lighting and fun splashes of color throughout, the dining room atmosphere was ideal and waitress April, a long-time fixture at The Café, was about to become our new best friend.

For drinks, we were in the mood for something potent so we ordered the fondue appetizer terrine and devoured quite quickly, and it wasn’t our table, which we smeared with honey but-brought focaccia-style bread to choice.

A pint glass, was an attractive 9.5% Belgian-style served with a bottle of Golden Monkey, a juice. For me, it’s not often I have any type of crafty beer, so I was enthralled by the thought of a Lemon Drop Martini to the Café Signature Long Island and Margarita Martini) are where our eyes wandered first as we began mulling our many options of the night.

My friend was immediately enthralled by the thought of a Margarita Martini, made of Patron, Absolut Citron, a splash of lime juice and fresh orange tron, Absolut Citron, a splash of lime juice and fresh orange juice. For me, it’s not often I have any type of crafty beer, so a bottle of Golden Monkey, a 9.5% Belgian-style served with a pint glass, was an attractive choice.

As we were leaving, roughly 90 minutes after we ordered the fondue appetizer terrine and devoured quite quickly, and it wasn’t our table, which we smeared with honey but-brought focaccia-style bread to choice.

A smiling servers’ assistant brought focaccia-style bread to our table, which we smeared with honey butter and devoured quite quickly, and it wasn’t long before we ordered the fondue appetizer for bread-dipping as we chatted.

Indeed it took us more than 20 minutes to make a decision.

Thankfully April was more than patient, subtly giving us her opinion on our considerations as we zoomed in on various dishes.

My friend, a self-proclaimed foodie, who at one time managed one of the area’s finest dining establishments, set her sights on the Pork Osso Bucco, a tender braised pork shank served with tomato and garlic mirepoix, demi-glace and crispy fried potatoes.

“This is something special,” she said, as she finished everything short of the bone, which April cheerfully offered to put in a box to take home for the dog. Since Pork Osso Bucco isn’t often seen on menus, she considered it a special treat.

Next up was dessert, a portion of the meal my friend and I never like to skip out on, and good thing we didn’t.

We thought the layered crème brulée was not much in need of a boost but the banana fritter, deep-fried in a pastry with bananas and fresh cream, sounded delightful. They arrived beautifully prepared and made for the perfect ending to an already charming evening.

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Distinctive Palate

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**Leggio’s Italian Ristorante**

- Lori’s famous chicken salad
- Chicken Francaise
- Peanut butter pie

DALLAS - Not having many nights out, we were ecstatic to have a date for two at Leggio’s Italian Ristorante, an eatery known as much for fine Italian dining as for its jovial atmosphere.

When we arrived, the hostess seated us immediately at a nice, cozy booth held with a reserved sign. Our waitress, Mary, greeted us and asked for our drink orders. Shortly afterward, she brought a bowl of Leggio’s famous, fresh, warm garlic knots.

If you haven’t tried them, you need to! Looking around, we observed several families as well as couples enjoying their meals and their company in a friendly atmosphere. We were served a bowl of Chicken Pastina soup, and it was delicious. A nice tomato-base soup filled with orzo noodles, chicken, carrots and more.

**Most popular ethnic cuisines across the country**

What constitutes “ethnic” food differs from person to person. Someone of Italian descent may dine regularly on garlic-infused pasta dishes, while a person from another area of the world may find such foods exotic.

In the cultural melting pot of North America, various cuisines representing countries that span the globe are within arm’s length for many people. According to Technomic, a Chicago-based research firm, 77 percent of Americans enjoy ethnic foods while dining out once a month.

Around 38 percent order ethnic food weekly. In addition, many more people prepare ethnic cuisine at home.

A growing interest in ethnic foods is fueled by young people. Technomic notes that millennials are more apt to want to try various cuisines and then incorporate them into their regular dining experiences. The National Restaurant Association found that 60 percent of people are likely to “tie their favorite ethnic food to their family history.” Interest in ethnic foods tends to be highest in urban areas where restaurants and ingredients may be more readily available.

When it comes to the top ethnic cuisines enjoyed throughout the states or provinces and territories, Chinese, Mexican and Italian rank for the top spots on diners’ plates. While the NRA has Italian cuisine as earning top-billing, Technomic’s list says that Chinese food, at 76 percent, followed by Mexican food (74 percent) and Italian (71 percent) comprise the biggest ethnic draws. Japanese or sushi comes in a distant fourth at 32 percent in the United States.

The statistics portal Statista indicates that, as of January 2015, Chinese, American and Italian foods are quite popular in Canada. However, the percentage of people who cook these foods as opposed to eating them out at a restaurant varies.

Chinese food is most widely enjoyed in a restaurant setting, while Italian food is frequently whipped up at home. As immigration tides change, ethnic cuisine may change with them. However, interest in experiencing ethnic dining is likely to remain consistent.
As we reviewed the menu, soft ambient music filled the modern yet comfortable space. Harvest Grill felt like the perfect place to spend an evening. Our knowledgeable server, Eryn, offered suggestions from Harvest Grill’s extensive list of seasonally inspired cocktails and local craft beer. My eyes immediately fell on the Pear Martini—which she also mentioned was a restaurant favorite. It was comprised of Prairie Organic Vodka, Dr. Loosen Riesling, and a fresh slice of a fresh pear. He decided on the Barritt’s Ginger Beer, a refreshing non-alcoholic beverage with a pleasant ginger flavor along with notes of citrus.

Much to our delight, we learned that their unique and delectable menu changes every three months to reflect the changing of the seasons. It was also refreshing to learn about Harvest Grill’s progressive approach to their cuisine: their abundant use of sustainable and organic food products—many of which were grown right here in NEPA—was impressive. It also seemed like the majority of their items were under 500 calories, which was a welcome surprise considering how full our bellies were about to become.

As we reviewed the menu, soft ambient music filled the modern yet comfortable space. Harvest Grill felt like the perfect place to spend this crisp fall evening. Our conscientious server checked on us a few times to see if we had decided. We couldn’t make up our minds!

As an appetizer, we chose the Thai Sesame Beef Lettuce wraps. The perfectly grilled beef paired well with the colorful pickled carrots, daikon radishes, edamame, and sriracha-sesame peanuts. As we drizzled the sweet & sour dipping sauce across our wraps, we marveled how fun and delicious this particular appetizer was—and how much we wanted to try the others! It was absolutely heavenly and very tasty.

As an entree, I chose the Cedar Roasted Organic Salmon. The salmon was exquisitely prepared, served on a cedar plank alongside a wonderful array of roasted fingerling potatoes, asparagus, grilled carrots, and crispy brussels sprouts with roasted garlic-lemon yogurt along with a grilled lemon. The entire dish was both luxurious and scrumptious. My boyfriend, who isn’t a huge seafood eater, remarked how he would be ordering the salmon next time we came to Harvest Grill!

After much back-and-forth, he decided upon the Grilled PA Grass-fed Filet Mignon. Its presentation—like the salmon—was photo-worthy. It was served sitting atop a savory potato & pear gravy with a host of crispy beef straws adorning the steak. The Bourbon balsamic mushrooms, pickled cipollini onions, and barberries were as delicious as it looked. Our evening ended with two fresh cups of coffee and two lush desserts—it was impossible to pick just one! We shared a creamy pumpkin Whoopie pie as well as the rich peanut butter and chocolate whipped cream.

As our dinner adventure was coming to an end, we promised to return again very soon. Our experience was unforgettable. The food was delicious and fresh, and the portions were just right. The preparation and presentation was superb! Everyone was quite knowledgeable and very pleasant. Harvest Grill takes dining in NEPA to a new level. This was the first of many wonderful experiences we hope to have at the Harvest Grill. Thank you Harvest Grill for a great evening and an exceptional five-star dining experience!
The health benefits of avocados

Food trends come and go. But one such trend that has seemingly enjoyed more staying power than other flavors of the month is avocado toast, a popular dish that might trace some of that admiration to how easy it is to prepare.

The popularity of avocado toast has exploded in recent years, but it has actually been around for decades. Many trace the origins of avocado toast to Australia, though it’s hard for food historians to say with utmost certainty where the dish was first served.

Avocado toast might be as healthy as it is popular. Avocados boast a host of health benefits, some of which might surprise even the most ardent devotee of avocado toast.

- **Avocados are loaded with vitamins.** According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s National Nutrient Database, avocados are a great source of numerous vitamins, including C, E, K, and B-6. Avocados also contain beta-carotene, which the human body converts into vitamin A that promotes healthy skin and a strong immune system.

- **Avocados can benefit vision.** Avocados contain lutein and zeaxanthin, a pair phytochemicals concentrated in the tissues of the eyes. Lutein and zeaxanthin are believed to block blue light from reaching structures in the retina, thereby reducing a person’s risk of developing macular degeneration. In fact, studies published in the American Journal of Epidemiology, the American Journal of Ophthalmology and The Archives of Ophthalmology found that diets high in lutein and zeaxanthin are associated with a lower risk of macular degeneration, which the American Macular Degeneration Foundation notes is the leading cause of vision loss in the United States.

- **Avocados may help fight depression.** Because they’re high in vitamin K, a nutrient that is crucial for bone health, avocados may also help reduce a person’s risk of developing osteoporosis, a condition characterized by bones becoming fragile and brittle due to loss of tissue. Vitamin K may help improve the intestinal absorption of calcium. That’s a significant benefit, as calcium deficiency has long been associated with a greater risk for osteoporosis.

- **Avocados may help fight depression.** Avocados are loaded with omega-3 fatty acids, which benefit the body in myriad ways. One of those ways is by helping to reduce the symptoms of depression. Polyunsaturated fats such as omega-3 fatty acids are thought to antagonize inflammatory cytokines that can contribute to feelings of depression.

- **Trendy foods come and go, oftentimes falling off the radar when their health benefits are overstated or proven dubious. However, the documented benefits of avocados may ensure the staying power of avocado toast.**
**Cusumano’s Italian Restaurant**

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**How to host a successful business dinner**

Throughout the history of commerce, many a deal has been made at the dinner table. Business dinners are a great opportunity to lay a foundation for long, potentially lucrative professional relationships.

- Etiquette is important when hosting business dinners, as a breach of decorum can derail a relationship before it even begins. Professionals tasked with hosting business dinners can take the following tips to heart before sitting down to break bread with their colleagues.
  - Choose a restaurant that can cater to various diets. Hosting a business dinner can be similar to hosting family during the holiday season, when hosts must cater to guests with various food allergies and dietary restrictions. Asking for such information in advance of a business dinner may seem intrusive to guests, so try to find a restaurant that offers a flexible menu capable of accommodating vegetarians, vegans and guests who might be gluten-free. Avoid restaurants that specialize in styles of cuisine that might be unhealthy or so extraordinary that guests may also give guests the mistaken impression that they are unimportant.
  - Let guests order first. Once everyone has sat down at the table, hosts should allow guests to order first. Doing so saves guests who don’t want to eat that much the potential discomfort of sitting there while their hosts eat an appetizer and/or large entrée. If guests choose to abstain from alcohol, follow suit. If guests want to have a drink, hosts can limit their consumption to a single beverage.
  - Don’t eat too quickly or too slowly. Hosts should try to keep pace with their guests in regard to how quickly or slowly they eat. Guests might feel uncomfortable if they finish first or feel pressured to eat quickly if their hosts finish first.
  - Pay in advance. Business dinner guests do not expect to pay for their meals. While it’s widely accepted that hosts will pay, it can feel awkward to have the bill brought to the table. Upon arriving early, hosts can give their credit cards to the wait staff and ask that they be charged without having the bill brought to the table. If necessary, step away from the table during the meal to sign the bill and address any discrepancies.

Business dinners have sparked many successful professional relationships, oftentimes thanks to hosts who took the time to ensure the dinners went off without a hitch.

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Dieting and dining out

Dining out is big business. A 2016 Consumer Reports survey of more than 68,000 subscribers projected that Americans would spend $720 billion at restaurants in 2016 alone. That equates to nearly half of every food dollar spent in the United States.

Dining out is a great way to try new things, experience new cultures without traveling overseas and spend time with friends and family. But men and women who are dieting or trying to gain greater control over the foods they eat may be nervous about dining out. Many restaurants feature nutritious foods that won’t compromise dieters’ goals of eating healthy. Dieters concerned about veering off course when they dine out can take the following steps to stay on course.

- Research menus before choosing a restaurant. Apps such as GrubHub and Seamless make it easier than ever for dieters to explore menus before booking reservations. Dieters can utilize such apps or their corresponding websites to peruse menus so they can rest easy knowing they will ultimately patronize establishments that won’t compromise their commitments to eating healthy.
- Order an appetizer instead of an entree. Controlling portion sizes can help dieters lose weight and keep the weight off. But many restaurants understandably serve large portions in an effort to entice their customers to get enough to eat and don’t feel cheated when the bill is presented. Dieters worried about entering portions and their ability to avoid the temptation to eat large portions can order exclusively from the appetizer menu. Appetizers are meant to complement a meal rather than provide the entire meal; just as a low-carb appetizer would not be an entirely healthy option for a low-carbohydrate dieter.

Dining out is incredibly popular, and diets don’t have to avoid their favorite restaurants.
OLD FORGE - Oftentimes when we think of Old Forge, we think of it as being the pizza capital of the world. But if you’re looking to expand your palate for a night out in the borough, I have just the spot for you.

Find your way to Anthony’s on South Main Street and you’ll see what I mean – even if it’s an off night, like a Tuesday, as a dining companion and I did on a recent evening.

Walk through the front door and see the long bar with regulars chatting and tables of four imbibing in appetizers, or saunter through the back into a spacious dining room that oozes intimacy. Either way, you’ll be greeted with a hello and a smile from the staff, and possibly a hug, as many regulars were on the eve in question.

Upon entering through the back that evening, the wait staff couldn’t have been friendlier, as they asked us which area we’d prefer to dine in. We chose the back room for its candlelight ambiance and relaxed environment.

Jen, our lovely waitress, was quick to offer us a drink. Known for my love of gin, I ordered a Tanqueray and tonic and was pleasantly surprised to see it come out with perfectly bubbly tonic water and the right twist of lime. My companion chose a house Cabernet, which she knew would complement the homemade baked (or double-baked) potato and green beans. And for me? One of the many dinner features: the pumpkin ravioli, an ideal selection for an October evening.

Once our order was in, the bartender made her rounds to the tables, asking how everyone was doing. As we chatted about our evening and choices for the night, she decided a pumpkin martini would be the perfect addition to my meal. And she was right. It was delivered filled to the brim and tasted like a glass of vodka-infused mocha pumpkin delight. Heavenly.

Both plates – and by this time, glasses were empty within minutes. Not because my companion and I are fast eaters, but because the meals were so savory and fresh it was hard not to devour quickly. Now the biggest question of the night: Could we find room for dessert? As Jen brought the dessert tray our way, I could tell it would be tough to turn everything down. From pumpkin cheesecake to mocha almond crunch, the tray was filled with homemade goodies. We settled on the peanut butter lush, a special treat adding whipped cream and chocolate pudding with a cherry on top. To say it was a glorious way to end our evening would be an understatement.

Jen thanked us graciously for coming in and welcomed us back if we come to Old Forge again. My companion and I decided it will forever be marked as a stop on our dining destination map.

Next up: the dinner menu. Think pasta, seafood and steaks. The options were numerous, and it proved to be a tough choice for us as the potato-baked salmon with horseradish cream sauce, Italian-style had-dock in a lemon and butter sauce, andveal franaise with lump crabmeat and asparagus were considered. Also pasta lovers, we de-bated the gnocchi with meatballs and fettucini alfredo before making our final decision.

For my dining companion? The chicken piccata with capers, accompanied by a twice-baked (or double-baked) potato and green beans. And for me? One of the many dinner features: the pumpkin ravioli, an ideal selection for an October evening.
DUNMORE -- What makes an ideal dining experience? Is it the quality of the food, the ambiance or the service?

In the case of Angelo’s Italian Ristorante in Dunmore, it’s all three.

Parking sometimes is a concern to those looking for a fine dining destination, but that isn’t the case at Angelo’s. We found the parking both spacious and accessible, located alongside the restaurant.

We were greeted at the door by a very friendly hostess who quickly led us to our table. Expecting a crowded environment on a busy night, we instead found patrons who were conversing and enjoying their dinners without drowning out our conversation.

As we took a quick tour before ordering, our hostess spoke kindly of Angelo’s long history in the Scranton area. A highlight was the gorgeous (and well-stocked) bar, a restored piece dating back decades.

After being seated, we gave our drink orders. We ordered a whiskey sour and a dirty martini, both of which were spot on. Our waitress allowed us time to make our dinner decision without hovering over us, a big plus. In fact, the wait staff had impeccable timing all night.

The most difficult moment of the evening was deciding what to eat. With a diverse menu featuring countless mouthwatering options, I decided on the Bistecca. This 14-ounce prime New York Strip was seared to perfection. The tender steak was absolutely ideal, but the signature sauce took the entree to a different level.

My dinner companion enjoyed the Gamberi Alla Romano, jumbo (and I do mean JUMBO) shrimp seared to perfection with white wine and fontina cheese. Taking an opportunity to steal one and sample the flavor, I was blown away.

When it came time for dessert, we both felt there was “no room” thanks to Angelo’s plentiful portions. However, our waitresses made a compelling case – with the aid of a full desert cart – and we acquiesced. We settled on the rice pudding, the perfect epilog to the perfect dining experience.

In summary, I couldn’t recommend Angelo’s more. If you’re looking for a classic upscale dining experience with a menu to match, yet not requiring a second mortgage, make your reservation today.

Angelo’s Italian Ristorante...is a visually attractive, hand decorated, art deco inspired motif which captivates the senses upon entrance through the illuminated lounge highlighting the 105 year old mahogany woodwork in the bar area and dining room.
Harvest Buffet

WILKES-BARRE TWP. — I built my day around the buffet. Soon after I woke up a few Saturdays ago, I was asked by a co-worker if I wanted to go to a buffet for dinner. Ummm (yum!), yes!

You see, I have a reputation around the office as a big eater, so I couldn’t turn down the assignment.

I usually have two hearty meals a day — the first about noon — but this day would need to be carefully planned since one of my meals would involve dining at the Harvest Buffet, located at East End Center in Wilkes-Barre Township.

Instead of a big lunch to get me to a big dinner, I would need a small lunch to get me to a very big dinner.

So I started with soup and a half-sandwich at home at 11 a.m. Then I went to work, where I began counting the hours until the food frenzy.

At 7:45, I got into my car in downtown Wilkes-Barre. At 7:55, I was at the Harvest Buffet, housed in the building formerly occupied by the Old Country Buffet off of Kidder Road.

The place was packed. I was surprised that at almost 8-o’clock on a Saturday night, most of the tables in the 10,000-square-foot restaurant were still taken.

I was greeted warmly at the door and shown to my table, a booth near a window. A manager would visit with me shortly, I was told, so I said to myself, “Take your time. I’ve got lots here to survey before I do any eating.”

Harvest Buffet serves Chinese, Japanese and American cuisines. I looked around and saw the vast offerings, which were amazing for the price. The buffet varies from $11.19 to $15.99, depending on the day and time. I zeroed in on the wonton soup. I love it and don’t eat it often, so I decided it would be my first appetizer.

I made sure to scoop two pork-filled dumplings out of the cauldron and put them into my cup so that I could gather the perfect mixture of wontons and broth. I wasn’t disappointed.

The dumplings and meat were tender, and the broth was perfect — just the right amount of salt so that no shaker grains would be needed. The temperature also was spot on. I don’t like soup that is too hot or barely warm.

So, one cup down. But with at least an hour remaining in my assignment, and a plethora of choices in front of me, the soup was so flavorful that I headed up for bowl No. 2.

By the time I had finished that delicacy, the hostess had checked on me twice. Not in a pestering way, but in a very pleasant, genuine, “May I get you anything?” manner.

Co-managers Bing Guo and Mark Matthews then came to my table, welcomed me, and told me that Harvest Buffet had been there since February and generally is packed from 5 to 8 p.m. on weekends. Bing also said he eats them three times a day — and sometimes a snack — which is a great sign for diners, showing that he believes in what the restaurant serves.

Bing and Mark were very friendly and helpful, but my mind was elsewhere — I was eying three food areas and plates galore, and I was on a mission, even though I had plenty of time until the restaurant closed at 10.

It’s at this point in my story where the narrative goes on hiatus and the bullet points begin, because when you’re at a buffet, it’s all about variety and quality.

• Salad. For me, crisp lettuce (moisture removed, thank goodness), ham bits, chery tomatoes, eggs (real ones, not processed egg particles), purple onions, fresh mushrooms, ranch dressing.

• Appetizers. Raw oysters, peel-and-eat shrimp, asparagus, egg rolls, fried dumplings. All were outstanding.

• Main course: If there is such a thing at a buffet, for me it was New York strip steak (served every night and cooked medium rare, always my favorite temperature), lo mein noodles and fresh broccoli. The course was prepared by a chef who manned the main area, and it was served by Bing, who had a smile on his face the entire night. With the steak, I wouldn’t have been surprised if it were overcooked and underwhelming, but it was as tender, flavorful and perfectly seared as those served at steakhouses. And the noodles and broccoli? Very pleasing to the palate.

• Second main course: Mac and cheese; steamed broccoli; Italian sausage, peppers and onions; steamed cauliflower. All delicious, and the broccoli and cauliflower were healthy choices, right mom?

• Last main course: Cantaloupe, melon, grapes and fried apples for my sweet tooth. Fresh, tasty and healthy.

• Dessert: Small piece of chocolate cake for my second sweet tooth. Nice and moist.

Overall, I had seven plates of food. Not jumbo plates, but plates befitting of a buffet that does it right, including presenting a home-style atmosphere, in which one woman knitted while her friend dined.

As I was finishing my feeding frenzy — a few crab legs because I somehow had bypassed them — a patron walked by and saw I was taking notes.

“She’s right. High-quality dishes, an abundance of options, clean surroundings and reasonable prices. You can’t beat that.”

The place is so good that he’s writing about it,” the man said to his dining companion.

I replied that I was writing a review. He answered not with words, but by patting his belly.

And so it goes at the Harvest Buffet. It’s not just the reviewer who was impressed by the place, but the patrons, as evidenced by the full parking lot and large crowd.

As I was getting up to leave, the hostess, Sharon, asked me if I had been to Harvest Buffet before.

I answered no.

“Not so,” she replied. “You’ll be back.”

She’s right. High-quality dishes, an abundance of options, clean surroundings and reasonable prices. You can’t beat that.

Harvest Buffet chef preparing food

Harvest Buffet's selection

Seafood bar

ALL YOU CAN EAT!

Italian Sausage
Vegetable Risotto
Kimchi
Carved Black Oak Ham
Lo Mein
Stuffed Porkloin
Snow Crab
Sushi
Chicken Franchise
Garlic Smashed Potatoes

Linguine Primavera
Banana Foster
Mozzarella Arancini
Chicken & Broccoli
Seafood in Saffron Broth
Buffalo Bites
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Harvest Buffet chef preparing food

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MOOSIC - The classic diner, with its chrome accents and welcoming atmosphere, is as much a part of America as Mom and apple pie. When you stop at Big Earl’s in Moosic, you’ll find that and much more.

Whether you’re looking for a place to meet an old friend for breakfast or somewhere to take the whole family for a great dinner, Earl has you covered. You’ll find numerous roomy booths, ensuring that you won’t feel crowded. However, Big Earl’s also features a full dining room with a classic décor highlighted by a gorgeous fireplace.

Every great diner is known for its breakfast. Big Earl’s is no different. A variety of three-egg omelettes and frittatas highlight the breakfast menu. If you’re not an egghead, try the flapjacks or Belgian waffles. The “Sunshine Connection” platter is always a favorite.

For lunch, Big Earl’s is well known for its salad selection highlighted by the star burst salad and Big Earl’s Signature Salad. Whether you call them subs, heroes or hoagies, you’ll love the Philly cheesesteak and hot wing. There’s also a wide choice of wraps, clubs and iconic sandwiches to choose from. The charbroiled burgers and Texas wiener are phenomenal.

If it’s dinner time and the only thing more empty than your stomach is your wallet, take advantage of the Saturday prime rib special or half-pound lobster tail with crabmeat stuffing. The portions are impressive and won’t leave you wanting more.

For a friendly, inviting atmosphere in a classic American setting with a wide variety of comfort foods done right, look no further than Moosic’s favorite diner!

See a complete menu at: www.bigearlsmoosic.com

Did you know?

According to Zagat’s 2016 National Dining Trends Survey, diners love sriracha, a spicy type of sauce that is made from a paste of chili peppers, distilled vinegar, garlic, sugar and salt. When asked how they feel about popular food trends, including sriracha, quinoa and bone broth, 31 percent of respondents said they love sriracha, making it the most popular item listed among the trends. Quinoa was the second most popular, with 27 percent of respondents saying they loved the protein-packed grain that also is high in fiber, iron and potassium. Ramen, a dish of wheat noodles that is traditionally served in a broth, was the third most popular trendy dish, with 26 percent of respondents saying they loved the dish. Respondents seemed to be losing their love for green juice, which was long touted, accurately or not, for its restorative properties and ability to boost consumers’ energy levels. Just 11 percent of survey participants said they loved green juice, while 35 percent admitted they were “over it.”
DALLAS - We had a beautiful dinner at Lum's Fernbrook Inn in Dallas. We were greeted by our waitress, Kate, who seated us (we had reservations). We had a delicious bottle of champagne, and on our table was a chart for lobster – what the restaurant is renowned for – along with menus and the specials.

I asked Kate what she recommended, and of course it was the Lobster Tail, along with the Crab and Sea Bass blackened (which was a special).

We ordered Maryland Crab Soup and Lobster Bisque ahead of time. The Maryland Crab was full of crab and was as flavorful as it looked. The Lobster Bisque was filling, with sweet, tender lobster. It also was delicious.

For one entrée we ordered the 16-ounce Stuffed Lobster with a twice-baked potato and green beans. The lobster was cooked to perfection, tender and sweet. The stuffing was all crab with little breading. Simply mouth-wateringly delicious. The potato also was wonderful, and the presentation of the dish was beautiful.

Our other entrée was Sea Bass Blackened with a twice-baked potato and coleslaw. The Sea Bass was amazing, seasoned perfectly and tender and delicious. Again, the twice-baked potato was superb., and the coleslaw which has been the recipe from the original owner, was the best I've ever had.

Kate brought our desserts: Key Lime Pie and the Swedish Apple Cake. The Key Lime was a winner for being made in Pennsylvania, and the Apple Cake was delicious and was made by Kate, who told us she won an award at the 2016 Luzerne County Fair. I can see why.

If you're looking for a great dinner and delicious desserts, you need to check out Lum's. And I recommend making reservations!
Upcoming Events

October 22
Knot Your Average Pairing: Wine & Pretzels
Galen Glen Vineyard & Winery - Andreas, South East PA

Fall Fest
Deer Creek Winery - Shippenville, North West PA

October 24
Cork & Canvas
Flickerwood Wine Cellars - Kane, North Central PA

October 27
“Hallowine” Costume Party
Crossing Vineyards and Winery - Newtown PA

October 28
HalloWINE Festival
Antler Ridge Winery, Capra Collina Winery, Grovedale Winery and Vineyards, Hidden Creek Winery, Lucchi Family Vineyards, Sand Castle Winery, Staggering Unicorn Winery, Winterland Winery - North East PA

HalloWINE Pairing & Helping the Homeless
Galen Glen Vineyard and Winery - Newtown PA

22nd Annual Fall Open House Weekend
Glades Pike Winery - Somerset PA

Painting in Pumpkin Land
Penns Woods Winery - Chadds Ford PA

Halloween Costume 7 Course Wine Dinner
CrossWinds Winery at Hershey - Hummelstown PA

Tail Great Party
Brookmere Winery & Vineyard - Belleville, South Central PA

Wine & Cupcakes
Crossing Vineyards & Winery - Newtown PA

Quizzo Night
Flickering Wine Cellars - Kane, North Central PA

October 29
Vinyasa Yoga & Wine Tasting
Crossing Vineyards & Winery - Newtown PA

HalloWINE & Spirits Fest-a-Palooza
Bloomburg Fairgrounds Industrial Building - Bloomburg PA

Please check participating winery websites for more information on tickets or admission prices.
Distinctive Palate

Sunday, October 22, 2017

Fire & Ice

Take in the Tastes on Toby Creek

Caribbean Jerk Ahi Tuna

TRUCKSVILLE - Enter Fire & Ice on Toby Creek in Trucksville and you're immediately smitten with the many distinct dining areas inside the restaurant known as much for its succulent seafood and meat entrees as its pub fare and hearth-baked gourmet pizzas.

Choose to sit in the bar with its high-top tables and one coveted booth or select a more intimate experience in the main dining room, where a large table for any size group or a table for two by the window are among the choices.

My friend and I were seated at a table for two in the corner of the restaurant – an ideal setting for a private business discussion or more intimate dining experience.

On this random Sunday evening, my friend and I had some business to discuss and life events to catch up on, so a quiet table with a friendly, but not overbearing waiter named John, was exactly what we wanted.

John was terrific, sharing with us the features of the day and immediately taking our drink orders. Ever the classy gentleman, my friend asked for a dirty martini that came out filled to the brim and shaken to perfection by bartender Phil. My Tangeray & Tonic was a nice, strong pour that set the tone for what was to be a delicious night.

First – and perhaps something Fire & Ice is best known for – was the bread. Oh, the bread. Fresh baked with homemade roasted garlic humus and whipped honey thyme butter as sides, it was served warm and had a savory taste.

We nibbled on the bread as my soup – thick cheddar potatos– came out. To say I enjoyed dunking the fresh bread into this cheddar potato bowl of Heaven would be an understatement.

As that was completed, we were ready to move onto salads. I went with the orange cognac with candied walnuts, gorgonzola and orange craisins, while my friend had the beloved Caesar. Both were finished within minutes.

We checked out the vast menu, eyeing up several risotto and pasta favorites and the hand-cut grilled steaks, as well as the various sandwiches (the famous Yesterday’s Bar Burger, the Sweet Bourbon Pork BBQ, and the Guinness Roast-ed Beef Short Rib, to name a few).

After much contemplation, we made our final decisions.

I choose the spaghetti bake. Built around fresh peppers, it was made with braised beef, sausage tosso, red wine Ragù and ricotta. It was enough to feed two and I thoroughly enjoyed the various tastes I experienced as I made my way through the bowl.

My friend decided on the Caribbean Jerk Ahi Tuna with pineapple salsa, sautéed soba noodles and julienne vegetables.

Both dishes were instant hits from the minute we tasted until the minute we finished. The dishes were, in our opinion, two of the best meals we had in quite some time. It made sense to us, considering head chef Gary Edwards explained he’s always looking for new, impressive dishes to satisfy his customers desires. And he’s always building new specials around what’s fresh, as was the case with my spaghetti bake and its abundantly fresh peppers that the dish was built around.

Finally, the miniature dessert tray at the end was a pleasant surprise. Considering how full we were, we left just enough room for a tiny raspberry cheesecake. Other choices included lemon crumb tart, a brownie with white and dark chocolate chunks and a small layer cake.

As if our meal and drinks at the table weren’t enough, we decided on just one more libation at the bar and were pleasantly surprised to see some couples taking a break out of their weekend to dine at the bar and the tables. We were among three other duos opting to have Phil, the bartender, make a final drink before departing.

As we left, we promised to return soon, for there's much more on the menu (both food and drink-wise) in which to explore.
We Have Something for Every Taste and Every Budget

NEW WINTER MENU
Locally Farmed Ingredients
Healthy Options  Seasonal Features

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UPCOMING EVENTS:
Wine Tasting Dinner: Friday, November 3
Santa Brunch: Saturday, December 10
Thanksgiving Dinner Buffet

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