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From the archive: Meet Epiphany Farms



CARLOS T. MIRANDA

Kenny Myszka, right, and Mike Mustard prepare a variety of plates Sept. 8 at the family home in rural Downs. (The Pantagraph/CARLOS T. MIRANDA)

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September 30, 2009 12:05 am • [By Phyllis Coulter | pcoulter@pantagraph.com](#)

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DOWNS -- Science teacher Brian Sparks used to look forward to having Ken Myszka in his chemistry class. It followed Myszka's home economics class, and the Tri-Valley High School student often brought something he'd cooked up in class.

Myszka, now 26, left the community to become an acclaimed chef in New York and Las Vegas. He's back with "a farm-to-fork concept" that has already got mouths

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Fall has arrived, and those preparing their

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Eventually, he and his team will grow all the fresh, organic produce on a farm near Downs for a "destination" restaurant in Bloomington expected to open in 2011.

In the meantime, Myszka and fellow professional chef Mike Mustard provide interactive dinner parties and cooking classes in Twin City-area homes. They also sell fresh harvests from Epiphany Farms at the weekly farmers market in Downs, and will offer cooking classes at the Garlic Press in Normal.

His goal is to "bring a better understanding of food, health and well being" to customers while leaving "the land a better place for the next generation."

"If you can accomplish your dreams in your lifetime, you are not dreaming big enough," quotes Myszka as he puts together pita chips and hummus as he would in a typical interactive dinner party/cooking class. Who knew hummus could taste so good?

Sparks recently attended a dinner party where the chefs prepared several courses of field-fresh food for the guests. Sparks wasn't surprised by his former student's talents.

"It was obvious" already in high school that he had a flair for cooking, Sparks said. "It's so cool to see a young person with that kind of passion," he said.

Myszka graduated from the Culinary Institute of America in New York in 2004 and earned a bachelor's degree in Hotel Restaurant Management last year in Las Vegas. While in Vegas, he met his future wife, Nanam Yoon, who grew up in Seoul, South Korea (they were married five months ago) and future business partner, Mustard. They joined his vision.

Myszka knew how good food could be with quality ingredients, and decided that food grown organically and responsibly could make a fine experience even better.

The former sous chef at Solo Restaurant in New York and at Company American Bistro says he learned many of his techniques as a saucier at Restaurant Guy Savoy in Las Vegas.

For the home parties, Myszka first scopes out the kitchen to see what he needs and what menu would best suit the event.

He adapts skills learned in Vegas restaurants, where the average plate was \$350, to dinner parties in the Twin Cities area where the menu pricing starts at \$35 a person. The price includes all food ingredients (mostly home grown), recipes, equipment and cooking lessons with the experienced chefs for a minimum of eight guests.

"We know how to open an amazing restaurant," Myszka said. It's the other parts they are learning.

They aren't farm boys. Myszka started in Chicago and Mustard in Sacramento. But what they have learned about manure management, natural pest control and general sustainable farming in a matter of months is remarkable.

Just as comfortably as they recite information they have learned from top chefs, they quote the theories of sustainable farming. They've done their homework. Overlooking the south hill of the farm where they live and operate their enterprise, in a large modern farmhouse with Myszka's parents, he points to the south and explains at what angle the sun will rise there in the winter to shine on their carefully planned winter crops.

Myszka envisions a day when the team will look at the inventory in the garden in the morning; plan the harvest and the menus, and serve extraordinary meals that evening.

"What grows together, goes together," Myszka said, waving an arm across the half acre of crops.

On a recent August day, this half-acre provided most of the ingredients for bruschetta with poached tear-drop tomatoes, roasted peppers, balsam and herbs.

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DOWNS -- On the south side of Epiphany Farms, a 350-square-foot greenhouse slopes 30 degrees toward the sun. Inside, the warm micro-climate ha... [Read more](#)

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A few days later it was the source of the morning's picked greens: cucumbers, cherry tomatoes, pickled red onion, lemon and red white vinaigrette with fresh herbs in the first course for a dinner party.

On the farm they raise grass-fed Angus cattle, free-range pork, pastured chickens and have fresh eggs as well as vegetables, fruit and herbs. Across the pasture from the pigs, the chickens are doing their thing in the team's "eggmobile." The mobile home of sorts provides safety at night as a base for daytime dining out.

Although they take their mission seriously, they have a lot of fun. They named the pigs after different pork products. So far they have Prosciutto, Pancetta, Mortadella, Bacon, Chops, Loin. Mustard's goal is to come up with different pork names without repeating them.

Myszka sees everything as connected in his sustainable systems. The natural way isn't always the easiest; it takes twice as long to raise cows on grass as to corn feed, and more labor to rotate the animals to keep pastures healthy.

While it's been about four years since Myszka's epiphany, he is now nine months into his three-year plan for getting the unique restaurant open.

While he was tempted by the bright lights and many customers of Chicago, Bloomington is his target town for the restaurant. He is building his production base on the farm, and his customer base through the home dinner parties.

Contact Epiphany

Reservations for interactive dinner parties and cooking, and also for farm tours, can be made at nanam@epiphanyfarms.com or by calling 706-528-7551. Online at www.epiphanyfarms.com.

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