



Taste of Arlington's 2010 Best of the Best

Every May, The Taste of Arlington transforms the streets of Ballston into a one day festival of great food, good music and fun. Showcasing restaurants from across the county, it's a foodie's dream come true. One of the highlights of the event are the Best of the Best awards, accolades given by industry experts to the restaurant with the best appetizer, entrée and dessert. To prepare for all the good things in store at this year's festival, On Tap talked to the 2010 Best of the Best.



Best Appetizer: Domaso Trattoria Executive Chef Paul Healey

On Tap: What was your winning appetizer?

Paul Healey: A trio of gazpacho. We had a regular gazpacho, a white gazpacho with grapes and almonds and a corn gazpacho.

OT: What's your signature dish?

PH: A mushroom fettuccine – seared mushrooms with a marsala cream sauce, Parmesan cheese and fettuccine. I came up with it a while ago and was at home and had to make myself something to eat and came up with it.

OT: Your motivation as a chef?

PH: I get driven by criticism. If I go to Open Table and don't see fives all across the board I know I have some work to do.

OT: How do you see this restaurant fitting into the Arlington scene?

PH: You are starting to see more and more good restaurants. I've noticed people who live in Arlington are really proud to live here so I think they are really supporting a non-chain restaurant that does good food with sustainable qualities. Even though we're a hotel restaurant, we're a unique restaurant and people are really excited about it.

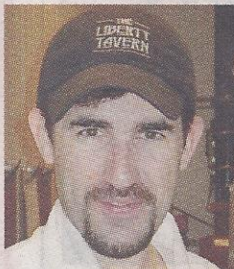
OT: Where do you like to eat in Arlington?

PH: Liberty Tavern, Lyon Hall and Restaurant 3.

Domaso Trattoria at the Hotel Palomar: 1121 N. 19th St., Arlington, VA; 703-351-1211; www.domasotrattoria.com.

Best Entrée: Liberty Tavern

Executive Chef Liam LaCivita



OT: What was your winning entrée?

Liam LaCivita:

It was brined and braised short ribs with a watermelon mostarda, a chutney type of dish. We will probably do something a little different for this year's Taste.

OT: What is your favorite dish to cook?

LL: Homemade pasta. One of my favorite is orecchiette, which means "little ear" in Italian. It's great but it's the biggest pain in the-you-know-what to make.

OT: Do you use a lot of local ingredients in your menu?

LL: Yeah definitely, from the time we opened up, especially in our seafood, pork and chicken dishes. I'd say sixty percent of our menu is sourced locally.

OT: Where do you like to eat when you go out?

LL: It really depends on the craving - for instance, I crave German and Austrian food in the fall. But I really don't go out a whole lot. I do enjoy Willow in Arlington.

OT: How do you see Liberty Tavern fitting into the overall restaurant scene in Arlington?

LL: I think we're on the forefront in terms of the culinary and beverage hospitality scene. It's a great demographic here and we pride ourselves on the local and regional foods we serve.

Liberty Tavern: 3195 Wilson Blvd., Arlington, VA; 703-465-9360; www.thelibertytavern.com.



Best Dessert: Union Jack's Executive Chef Michael Ritt

On Tap: What was your winning dessert?

Michael Ritt: The bread pudding. It's the sauce that makes it. Lots of people do a whiskey sauce but we do a Captain Morgan spiced rum sauce. We use all fresh ingredients and cook everything slowly so it's not burned. We use French baguettes, white bread, raisins, and we soak the raisins in a little bit of water and rum. I wanted to try something different – no one does a rum sauce so let's do a spiced rum sauce.

OT: Do you have a signature dish?

MR: Marinated chicken that's seared and served with a Jameson whiskey mushroom cream sauce with honey. You always know something's good if they order it for their meal.

OT: What three ingredients would you use to make a dish?

MR: Well, booze, first of all. I love garlic too. Chicken probably too.

OT: What's your own favorite alcohol?

MR: I like Coconut Rum. My wife and I went on a cruise recently and everyone was coconut rum. I had to think of something I could cook with it.

OT: Where do you like to eat?

MR: I love me some Maggianos!

OT: How does Union Jack's fit into the Arlington restaurant dynamic?

MR: We're trying to make it like your neighborhood pub. We don't want it to be known as the place to have beer and wings. We want it to be a place where you can come and have a good dinner. We have a ton of variety and we try to make everything as close to scratch as possible.

Union Jack's: 671 North Glebe Rd., Arlington, VA; 703-778-3568; www.unionjacksballston.com.

This year's taste of Arlington takes place May 22nd from noon to 5 p.m. in front of Ballston Common Mall. For tickets and information, www.tasteofarlington.com.