

PA'S SWEET SPOT

Why groups should head to Hershey & Harrisburg

CROWD-PLEASERS

Meet performers who are changing event entertainment

pennsylvania meetings + events

MEETINGSMAGS.COM // WINTER 2016



*Full of
Flavor*

5 tasty trends will make
2016 a year to savor

SOUP'S

[NOT THE ONLY THING]

ON!



.....

Here's the latest in food trends, from busting the egg myth to interactive dessert stations. By Carolee Noury

.....



●
SOUP IS THE ULTIMATE
COMFORT FOOD.

EXCITING DEVELOPMENTS are brewing in the food industry, pointing toward a delectable new culinary year. Pop culture, science and technology combine to spice up event and day-to-day cuisine.

The restaurant industry is notoriously difficult to break into and even those that make it in often struggle to become profitable. For those rave-worthy hidden gems that disappear all too often, this year may offer more staying power thanks to the growth of crowdfunding. With nearly endless possibilities for recipes, our second trend is the demand for soups at events and for quick healthy meals. No longer relegated to the coldest months, hearty soups offer a delightful addition to any meal. Eggs are breaking in the new year with a better reputation among health gurus. Egg-lovers rejoice: There are many benefits to this quality protein.

Desserts, those beloved mealtime stars, continue to offer new delights. Dessert stations are gaining popularity for all kinds of events thanks to their role in drawing out creativity and conversations. And what better note to end on than smooth, local spirits? Craft distilleries offer hand-crafted, small batch liquors to take your favorite cocktail to the next level.



TREND NO. 1

Crowdfunded Restaurants Offer More Options with Fewer Restraints

The food industry can be unforgiving. Breaking in is a feat and staying there is even more difficult. Bank loans are few and too often qualifying for them requires the kind of financial stability that would render them unnecessary. Beyond traditional banking are investors who back new restaurants while focusing on the business world's definition of success. The rules of the business world don't always translate to rave-worthy kitchens, leading to clashes with chefs that can end in stifled creativity and dissatisfied diners. More and more new and seasoned restaurateurs

have turned to crowdfunding options to bring their dreams to fruition.

Like many of their peers, the desire to avoid debt is what brought Elisabeth “Liz” Augustine and her husband Mike, of Like My Thai restaurant in Erie, to crowdfunding platform Kickstarter. “We were running a pop-up restaurant that was very popular,” Liz says. “We knew we had the makings of a full-time place and Mike had over 13 years of experience in the restaurant industry at that point. We’d worked really hard to pay off the debt from his first restaurant. The last thing we wanted to do was borrow money to start another.”

Crowdfunding works by collecting small amounts of money (generally through the Internet) from a large number of people. The additional benefit of this method is the cultivation of a tribe of dedicated followers. Those crucial fans lift the crowdfunding model above other alternatives. “The constant positive feedback from our customers—old and new—really sets it apart. It’s like running a race, people cheer you all the way to the finish line. Knowing there were so many people waiting for us to open really pushed us to make the best use of the funding,” Liz says.

It also made a difference when the owners were considering changing their name to something more consistent with the spectrum of Southeast Asian foods they serve in addition to Thai. Augustine posted the question on the Facebook page and was surprised by the strong support for keeping the name. “If we hadn’t built that close-knit community by crowdfunding, their opinions might not have carried as much weight,” she says. “But when people are giving you money to do what you love, you listen to what they have to say. I’m glad we did, since it was clear we’d created a strong brand with Like My Thai.”

While this opportunity has many bonuses, it requires a challenging mix of ingenuity, perseverance and time. The most successful ventures start with comprehensive strategic plans focused on the connection between potential donors and the project mission. One important task involves the rewards donors get based on their contribution level. Augustine says she relied on outside help to determine Like My



Thai’s rewards. “Professor Kris Wheaton of the Quickstarter group was an indispensable part of this process,” she says. “I had a list of about 20 things to give away, and he helped us choose the best items. He also gave us excellent suggestions we wouldn’t have thought of on our own, like offering to make people dinner in their homes. We had more meetings about those rewards than anything else.”

Record keeping—tracking rewards, keeping an eye on progress toward the goal, counting down to the deadline for sponsors and the like—requires a significant time investment, especially since campaigners must simultaneously respond to questions and work to inspire others to share the information within their own networks. Promoting the campaign is no small feat in the busy realm of social media, packed as it is with competition for people’s attention (and money). Augustine originally followed the advice to maintain a presence on as many social media outlets as possible,

but soon found that Facebook alone worked best for them. “We could reach out to people of all ages. With our attention focused on just one, we were able to use more time to make our business page sleek and inviting. We also learned the art of paying to boost posts. Facebook was the single most important tool for helping us to get the word out,” she says.

At Like My Thai, business is good. “Our success also attracted an investor, my now business partner and co-owner Bonnie Brown-Baker,” says Augustine. “We have been friends for over 16 years. Like My Thai’s popularity during the pop-up business days, then subsequently with Kickstarter, inspired Bonnie to become a part of our Like My Thai family. Her input and experience has really helped us to be where we are today. Now we have seven employees who work very hard to make our business something we can all be proud of. We’re right on track according to our three-year plan.”



TREND NO. 2

Handmade Soups for All Seasons

For as long as humans have been cooking over fires, some form of soup has been simmering. It has appeared on restaurant menus since the 18th century. Soup is an excellent dish for those looking to increase their vegetable intake. Those with a source of protein, such as chicken or lentils, can be just as filling as solid foods.

Not all soups are equal, of course. “I don’t use recipes,” says Patty McCue, owner of Patty’s Soup, Salad and Such in Wyomissing. “Instead I develop my soups based on how the ingredients work together. I always use fresh. When it’s available, I use local produce. Each batch of soup is handcrafted, which makes it stand out when customers compare it to what they’re used to.” What

they’re used to is often a premade soup other establishments pour from a bag or can.

McCue finds inspiration for her varieties in all kinds of places. Her Hearty Shepherd’s Pie Chowder was inspired by its namesake. The corn chowder is “especially delightful” when local sweet corn is available at a nearby farm. “The flavor is incredible. Once the corn is steamed, I put the corn cob back into the pot to coax more of it out. When you work to draw out the best flavors of your ingredients, you get something special. It becomes a roller coaster of flavors.”

Soup sales have been increasing steadily for McCue, even in the summer as people seek an antidote to their over-cooled offices. Her catering orders are on the rise as well: “I think people have recognized the health benefits of soup. There are usually fewer calories in a bowl of soup than in a sandwich and chips. Most soups offer several kinds of vegetables.”

EGGS ARE NO LONGER RELEGATED TO BREAKFAST AND DELIGHT IN A VARIETY OF FORMS, INCLUDING QUICHES AND FRITTATAS.



TREND NO. 3

Eggs are No Longer the Breakfast “Baddie”

For a long while eggs were cited as a culprit in rising cholesterol levels in the U.S. Research has put that misinformation to rest scientifically, but it’s still taking some time for people to welcome eggs back into their diets. Studies have shown that cholesterol from eggs does not significantly raise levels in participants’ blood, except for certain groups at higher risk for heart disease, such as those with diabetes. In fact, other studies have shown that when eggs are consumed in moderation, they offer benefits that may actually protect the heart.

Marissa Puleo, registered dietitian nutritionist and owner of Thrive Nutrition, is a champion for healthy egg consumption. “Eggs are a great source of protein that’s easy to digest. They’re versatile. You can cook them in



●
SUNDAE BARS BRING OUT THE
CREATIVITY, AND THE KID, IN
ALL OF US.

so many ways any time of the day. Personally, I like to keep a quiche on hand for when I need a quick meal. It's also a great way to get more vegetables into your diet."

There are some important things to keep in mind, though, when including eggs in your diet. "Eggs are an excellent staple in a balanced diet. It's important to take a look at the whole meal your eggs are served with. A lot of the things we're used to eating with eggs—bacon, hash browns, cheese, white bread—decrease their nutritional profile. Make sure you check with your doctor if there's any reason to suspect you may be at risk for heart disease. If there's no medical reason to cut back, then try for 3-4 each week. They are packed full of things that are good for you," Puleo says.

Eggs from pasture-raised hens are indeed a nutritional powerhouse. They have omega-3s (especially those from hens fed omega-3 supplements), vitamin E and all the B vitamins, including choline, which can be hard to get from food.

TREND NO. 4 *Interactive Desserts*

Desserts often bring out the best in people with their role as that wonderful prize at the end of a (hopefully) healthy meal. Discerning caterers have found a way to amp up that experience at events. They accomplish this by offering separate dessert stations where guests have a chance to mingle while making selections. Others take traditional desserts like ice

cream sundaes, candy, cookies and cupcakes, and serve them on a bar. The arrangement allows diners to customize, mix and top their desserts with their favorite fixings.

The Pheonixville location of Petrucci's Ice Cream offers a variety of packages for event desserts. The Ice Cream Store at Your Door, for instance, includes ice cream and water ice (both include a choice of flavors), gelati, smoothies, root beer floats, mocha lattes and a full sundae bar with toppings. The package includes two hours of service by staff working out of a trailer. Petrucci's catering menu also includes pretzels and a variety of lattes.

Petrucci's office manager, Bernadette Auth, says sales are strong. The 2015 projections are over 50 percent higher than the previous year. "I believe the trend is related to the popularity of food trucks. They are boosting the demand for fun dessert stations. Since we use a concession trailer, we can work with people interested in either or both," she says.

Related trends have also worked their way into dessert station requests. "Our No. 1 package seller is the Mixed Package," says Auth. "It offers ice cream, water ice and gelati. It's a great crowd-pleaser because it has a little bit of everything. Our second most popular is our Make Your Own Sundae Bar. We scoop the ice cream and then you get to build. It's a great, interactive way for companies to thank their employees and get everyone chatting in a casual environment."

They're also getting more inquiries for gluten-free and nut-free selections. "We offer several options to accommodate people with

food allergies," Auth says. "People are also looking for more funky flavors, not just vanilla or chocolate. Caramel Salted Pretzel is one of our biggest sellers." Petrucci's has also experienced increased requests for party orders to-go. "People have been ordering our packages and serving them on their own at block parties, birthday parties, et cetera," she says.

TREND NO. 5 *Shaking Things Up with Local Spirits*

Small batch, craft liquors offer a flavor profile unlike their mass-produced counterparts. Thanks in part to licensing changes by the State of Pennsylvania in 2011, craft distillers have more flexibility and less costs in their operations. Since that time, an array of distilleries has been putting out top-notch products.

Bluecoat American Dry Gin—the flagship spirit from Philadelphia Distilling—is a small batch, artisanal variety of the popular spirit. Andrew Auwerda, president and co-founder of the company, makes a comparison between his gin and nationally recognized brands, "It's the difference between eating fresh, gourmet pizza and one from the freezer section. The difference is in the process. We have developed standard operating procedures that allow us to craft a consistent product. Bluecoat is made from high-quality ingredients. Our gin is distilled with 100 percent organic botanicals in a hand-hammered copper still which was



●
BARREL FINISHED EGG NOG MADE WITH
BLUECOAT AMERICAN DRY GIN IS A SPIRITED
TAKE ON THE HOLIDAY CLASSIC.

designed specifically to make gin. That combination makes our gin incredibly smooth.”

Liquor fans tend to be faithful to their favorite spirit, which is a blessing and a curse in Auwerda’s industry. “Since they’re loyal to their liquor of choice, it can be a challenge to get them to try something new. We have to entice them to try ours, which can be a challenge,” he says. “We’re competing with products that are national, have a much larger advertising budget, and have been around—in most cases—for decades or longer.”

To reach its fan base, Bluecoat attends many events and hosts tastings in its distillery year-round. Tours cover the process “from grain to glass,” inviting guests to experience the entire span of developmental stages. They also get to learn about the multilayered and centuries-old history

of spirit production in the U.S. “People love to learn about the cultural influences on alcohol production, something that is particularly relevant to Pennsylvania. Bluecoat is a tribute to those colonial soldiers who fought for our independence.”

Once Bluecoat has attracted its fans, that loyalty brings them back again and again. Sold in a majority of liquor stores in the state, Bluecoat devotees generally don’t have to travel far to find it. “The dedication toward our product is amazing. We get phone calls and handwritten letters,” says Auwerda.

The Bluecoat team is excited to offer more space and amenities in its new distillery in the Fishtown neighborhood of Philadelphia. Guests now have the option of enjoying sit-down meals in the on-site restaurant and reserving event space right in the distillery. 🍷

GET CONNECTED

BLUECOAT AMERICAN DRY GIN
bluecoatgin.com

LIKE MY THAI
likemythai.com
814.455.1026

PATTY’S SOUP, SALAD AND SUCH
pattysoup.com
610.378.1333

PETRUCCI’S ICE CREAM
petruccisicecream.com
610.933.9390

THRIVE NUTRITION
marissapuleord.com
570.604.2733