

feast for the Soul

The Capitol Grille brings together fabulous chefs for a great cause

BY STEPHANIE STEWART

Ideally, a feast—as opposed to, say, a big meal—should be composed of more than lots of food. The food itself should tempt the senses—sight, smell and taste combined to create a visceral reaction. That's certainly true of the amazing meal Capitol Grille chef Tyler Brown organized and held on May 31 to support Share Our Strength, a charity dedicated to ending childhood hunger in America. Joining Brown were Capitol Grille pastry chef Andy Manchester, plus Jason McConnell of Sol and Red Pony, Hal Holden-Bache of Eastland Cafe, Tandy Wilson of City House, Deb Paquette of Zola and Sean Brock, formerly of Nashville, now chef at Charleston's prestigious McCrady's. The remarkable collection of chefs—some of the best of the young generation of Nashville culinarians—all with an interest in sourcing food locally and working with seasonal ingredients, came together to create a meal with extraordinary parameters in taste and inventiveness.

In contrast to the brilliant menu is the reality, as Share Our Strength (SOS) understands and disseminates to the public—that one out of every six children in America is at risk for hunger (yes, you read the statistic right). By dining out at events like A Tasteful Pursuit, patrons have a chance not only to surrender to Epicurean delights provided by great chefs, but to help children who really need a good, nourishing meal—or two, or more. And that makes for a win-win situation.

Nashville, like most cities nationwide, is possessed of food deserts—areas of town where there are no real grocery stores in walking distance and few residents with reliable transportation. As a result, kids are often likely to subsist on calorie-dense nutritionally worthless processed snacks and fast foods—because that's what's available. This affects the energy needed to learn and adds to the obesity epidemic, among other sad consequences. So when the people with mad culinary skills set out to make a difference, it's worth listening to them—and feeling good about eating.

Chef Tyler Brown says he got involved with the event through an old friend, Bradford Thompson, James Beard Award-winner and executive chef at the Lever House Restaurant in New York City. Thompson has long been involved with Share Our Strength and serves as the 2009 Spokesperson for A Tasteful Pursuit. He created A Tasteful Pursuit himself five years ago—envisioning a series of dinners nationwide all aimed at raising funds for the same goal, and using some of the nation's top chefs.



“He [Thompson], along with Joe Allegro, the head of SOS, asked me to participate in the Nashville Tasteful Pursuit about three years ago,” recalls Brown. “I’ve been blown away by the response to the event, and I wanted to commit to growing our own community resources and also try to do something to make a difference—and maybe have a little fun doing it.”

For the chefs, who’ve already built a working relationship over the years (several of them have worked together at some of Nashville’s best restaurants in the past, including Margot and F. Scott’s), the weekend of the SOS dinner proved to be about camaraderie and sharing, as well as commitment to a great cause. “We spent Saturday talking and breaking bread together—always great—at City House with Tandy Wilson,” says Brown. “Sunday was just a great day. It was fun in the kitchen for all of us.”

Asked about how the menu came about, Jason McConnell says, with a cheerful laugh, that he’s not a big fan of poultry, so Brown “volunteered” him to take that course. “I kept it as simple as possible,” he says. “I’m a huge fan of gnocchi, and also of duck, so the idea naturally progressed from there. If there was any theme for this menu, it was probably ‘Nashville Italian’—spring and summer fare, much of it locally sourced, the way they do in the Mediterranean.”

McConnell adds that while his own course was not wholly local, some of them were very much so.

“My goal,” says Tyler Brown confidently, “is to bridge the gaps between the local chef’s community and the local

TOP LEFT: Tyler Brown and Andy Manchester photo by Ron Manville. All other photos by Tasteful Pursuit





menu

Hors d'oeuvre

Hal Holden-Bache, Eastland Cafe and Deb Paquette, Zola

First Course — Ricotta crespelle, zucchini, Calabrian chiles, lemon, mint
Tandy Wilson, City House

Second Course — Wild salmon, English peas, morels, brown butter-black garlic crumble
Sean Brock, McCrady's, Charleston, S.C.

Third Course — Gnocchi and ragu of duck with Pecorino
Jason McConnell, Red Pony, Sol

Fourth Course — Spring lamb loin, fava beans, fennel, olive, Meyer lemon
Tyler Brown, Capitol Grille

Fifth Course — Grappa and mint macerated cherries, mascarpone, Valrhona chocolate
Andy Manchester, Capitol Grille



food producers. We can find local produce, local meats and make connections, finding the people who want to work with us. Tennessee honestly has wonderful things to offer—vegetables, meat, game. I really want to celebrate that.”

When any of these chefs is working, chances are good an accurate term is “celebration”—of flavors, of menu choices, or of inventive cooking and culinary techniques. The marvelous thing about events like A Tasteful Pursuit is that they allow the Nashville audience to appreciate so many of these talents in the same space, and revel in the creativity they inspire in each other. When that allows us to give back to the community in turn—specifically, when it allows us to help children whose culinary options are few and far between, it’s more than just a good thing.