

A Campus Food Revolution

at the University of Guelph

BY MARK KENNY



Right: Executive Sous Chef Gord Cooledge



Across Canada, the times they are a changin', especially in university foodservice. The day's trends include local-food procurement, sustainability initiatives, social media storytelling, gluten-free meals, carbon-footprint reduction, and the promotion of fairly traded products.

The shifts taking place in these areas of campus life are opening new doors. The University of Guelph ("Guelph") is one of a number of universities that are leading the way in revolutionizing how food is prepared and served on campus. For Guelph, it's a door that's been widely opened with both feet firmly planted inside.

Hospitality Services at the University of Guelph has been feeding students since 1973. It's an in-house operation that's almost as old as the university, which will celebrate its fiftieth birthday this year. A lot has changed in forty-one years. Over 20,000 students, faculty and staff now call the friendly campus home. Old Jeremiah the Cannon has found a new spot. There's an organic farm right on campus. The University Honey Bee Research Centre is buzzing with excitement, as are new food-loving fans including many children from the university's daycare facility. During orientation days, it's clear that many

prospective students favour Guelph simply because the food is so darned good. Guelph could not be more proud of the recognition it receives.

The innovative changes happening at Guelph are founded on the university's mandate to change lives and improve life. Having the right people in the right place at the right time doing the right things makes for long-lasting and successful change.

One of the passionate team members leading the way and implementing delicious change is Executive Sous Chef Gordon Cooledge. Gord has been practicing his art for thirty years, having trained in restaurants and hotels in Toronto, Bermuda and Switzerland. He was the executive chef at McMaster University before moving to Zimbabwe, where he and his wife Anita established an orphanage which included a primary school, secondary school, medical clinic, church, and children's nutrition program. A strong proponent of using fresh, local foods, Gord is responsible for the culinary team at Guelph's Creelman Hall, which includes a vegetable processing facility and the wildly popular 100 Mile Grille restaurant.

Chef Cooledge is passionate about quality food. He cares about people and knows how to bring out the best of what the land provides. To see where his talents really shine, one need only stand in front of the 100 Mile Wall of Fame. The contents of the preserved condiments cramming two 10-foot-high shelves were sourced from within a hundred miles of campus and prepared for exclusive use by the 100 Mile Grille.

Also leading the way to fabulous cuisine at Hospitality Services is Executive Sous Chef Vijay Nair. Vijay is the talent behind the plate at Guelph's full service catering department and its largest production kitchen. His attention to detail and talent gleaned from an illustrious culinary career in India, on cruise ships, and in the kitchens of top-rated Ontario hotels, are highlighted on every plate served at daily



Chef Gord and I (the department's purchasing coordinator) have worked together over the past year to source the best of the harvest to use at the new restaurant. Notable sources include the Elmira Produce Auction, Don's Produce, and the University of Guelph's research station farms. Our delicious range of condiments features flavours representative of the region: Niagara peach salsa, Wellington Beer BBQ sauce, charred corn salsa, zucchini relish, and spicy tomato ketchup are just a few of the items our team serves atop the 100 Mile Grille's 100-percent-local burgers.

The menu's other select local ingredients are as impressive, and delicious, as the condiments: Hayter's Farm turkey burgers, Bright Cheese curds for poutine, Rounds Brand beans in the vegan burger, Woolwich Dairy goat cheese, Grainharvest Breadhouse pretzel buns, and Downey Farms potatoes for our fresh, hand-cut fries. Hospitality Services has worked with many local farmers, distributors, processors and other regional suppliers to design a menu that showcases the best of what Ontario has to offer. Gord adamantly states that, "Freshness and quality of ingredients is the recipe for success and the key to making award-winning food."

meals and special events, including up to forty weddings per year on campus. Many of the brides and grooms are Guelph alumni.

Hospitality Services focuses on supporting Ontario farmers; the motto for its local-food initiative is Preserving Local, Sustaining Ontario. This is likely one of the reasons that for ten years in a row, an annual *Globe and Mail* survey has named the University of Guelph the number one foodservice operation among medium-sized Canadian universities.

Anita Stewart, the university's official food laureate, is very enthusiastic about Hospitality Services' dedicated commitment to supporting local foods on its menus. Over the years, Anita has invited many guests to tour campus facilities, including the innovative Creelman Produce Processing Facility. Hospitality Services received a grant from the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation to help build the facility and in 2012 was named one of the Greenbelt's "10 Local Food Champions." This facility allows Guelph to purchase large volumes of locally grown fruits and vegetables that are then processed and placed into freezers and storage facilities for use well after harvest season. A wide variety of fresh produce freezes well and the team have been



slicing, dicing and puréeing their way to more local flavours on more local plates.

More changes in the campus kitchens are coming on the heels of these recent projects. The University of Guelph has been chosen as one of ten broader public sector institutions that will compete in the 2014 OntarioFresh.ca Local Food Challenge. The objective is to use our passion for fresh, local food and continue to expand its use through a specific project of our choice. This challenge will see Guelph's processing capabilities move another step forward. Hospitality Services has purchased equipment to manufacture its own hamburger patties using 100 percent locally raised beef, pork and lamb, and to smoke whole cuts of Ontario meats for use in many of its foodservice operations across campus. Smoked local cheeses, fish and other unique menu items will find their way onto our plates throughout the semesters. This revolution in foodservice campus dining is sure to be a big hit with faculty, staff and students alike.

Change is happening in the local community, as well. Hospitality Services is a member of, and works closely with, Taste Real - Guelph Wellington Local Food. This Wellington County initiative—a collaborative effort involving over 120 local businesses and supporters—supports the promotion and marketing of local food in the region. Taste Real's partners are passionate about how local food is grown, prepared and presented, and how real it tastes. Hospitality Services works with Taste Real to help change the notion that local-food barriers are hard to overcome in the broader public sector. The results of this effort clearly show that perseverance, timing, and passionate people make for successful local-food changes in large foodservice organizations.

Hospitality Services also recognizes the importance of educating its customers and the general public about how we manage local food on a large scale. We believe it's important to tell our story and, to this end, we can often be heard lecturing in classrooms and at conferences and social events in an effort to help other supply-chain managers overcome perceived barriers to local-food procurement and further their support of purchasing local food.

Forty-one years young, and things are still a-changin'. Keep your eyes peeled for more passion, more promise, and more promotion of local food from Hospitality Services at the University of Guelph. 

University of Guelph Hospitality Services:
www.hospitality.uoguelph.ca

Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation: www.greenbelt.ca

Taste Real: www.tastereal.ca

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