



Culinary Corner

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FEATURE



Bobby Cochran/CW photos

A traditional hearty Irish breakfast is offered all day at O'Shea's Irish Pub in The Fountains shopping center in south Charlotte.

bacon, black and white pudding, two eggs, baked beans, Irish soda bread and a grilled tomato.

On St. Patty's Day, O'Shea's will also offer assorted celebratory beverages and a tasty Irish stew at outdoor bars. For more information, call the pub at 704-708-4533 or visit www.osheascharlotte.com.

Irish eats

Although eating green-dyed food and drinking green beer have become somewhat of a tradition in this country, customary Irish favorites aren't green at all. Bring a bit of Irish heartiness and merriment to your own table with several standards from the Emerald Isle. Irish stew serves as a main course, with a side of Irish soda bread, and a rich three-layer chocolate Guinness cake for dessert.

IRISH STEW

- 1/4 cup finely chopped celery
- 1/4 cup finely chopped carrots
- 1/4 cup finely chopped leeks
- 1 lb. mushrooms
- 3 Tbsp. butter
- 3 Tbsp. olive oil
- 1 lb. boneless leg of lamb, cut into chunks
- 8 Yukon Gold potatoes, peeled and quartered
- 2 cups chicken broth
- 1/2 cup dry white wine or pale ale
- 2 cups diced tomatoes
- Salt and pepper to taste

Erin go bragh in Charlotte

Festivities, food frame Charlotte's quintessential Irish holiday

by Heidi Billotto
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Isn't everyone Irish on March 17?

Saint Patrick's Day puts Charlotte, with her deep Scots-Irish roots, in a celebratory mood. An estimated 40,000-plus spectators and participants will gather next Saturday for the city's 11th annual St. Patty's Day parade and the Charlotte Goes Green Festival, and a smattering of Irish pubs in the area will hold daylong celebrations.

Revelry at Ri-Ra

Dublin transplants David Kelly and Ciaran Sheehan opened Ri-Ra Irish pub on North Tryon Street in March 1997. Aside from a decade of service, the restaurant rings in the Irish holiday starting at 9 a.m. on March 17, with music and dancing into the wee hours. On the menu, look for standard pub food as well as several Irish specialties like boxty, Irish potato pancakes; shepherd's pie; beef 'n' Guinness stew; and corned beef and cabbage. Lunch and dinner menus also include a few Irish-American variations like the Guinness BBQ burger and the Irish club sandwich featuring Irish rashers. For starters, you've got to love a place that lists a pint of Guinness stout among the appetizers.

Amid the festivities and the masses that will crowd the uptown pub, it may be easy to miss several inter-

esting Ri-Ra fixtures. The Victorian bar in the middle of the pub was built in the early 1800s as the officers' mess in the Phoenix Park Barracks in Dublin. The bar was removed in 1920 and stored in a Dublin garage for more than 70 years. The etched glass panels date from the early 1800s. The precise origin of the statue of St. Patrick, which is well over 100 years old, is unknown. However, it was not uncommon for a rural Irish town to have a statue at the entrance to give a blessing to all passers-by.

While visiting the pub, enter to win a trip for two to Cork, Ireland, for the Guinness Jazz festival in late October. Airfare and weekend accommodations are included. Entries are accepted at the pub or at the Ri-Ra Web site, www.rira.com, until June 30.

Plenty o' fun at O'Shea's

In south Charlotte, right near the Union County line, enjoy St. Patty's Day festivities at O'Shea's Irish Pub, located at 8129 Ardrey Kell Road in The Fountains shopping center. Owner Mike Callahan, one of the original organizers of Charlotte's St. Patrick's Day Parade, will host what he hopes will become an annual event. Plans are for an all-day outdoor festival with games and activities for children, T-shirts, giveaways and more.

The restaurant will serve its regular fare, including traditional favorites such as fish and chips, bangers and mash, Irish potato and leek soup with Irish soda bread and homemade cottage pie. O'Shea's also offers an all-day traditional breakfast featuring Irish sausage,



Fish and chips and a pint o' Guinness stout are the perfect Irishman's lunch or dinner.

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Season lamb chunks with salt and pepper and sear in butter and oil in the bottom of a stock pot until lightly browned on all sides. Remove from pan and reserve. Add celery, carrots and leeks and cook in the same fat until soft and lightly browned. Add mushrooms and sauté. Return lamb to pot. Add tomatoes, potatoes, broth and wine or beer. Bring to a boil. Cover and reduce heat to cook slowly for 40-45 minutes. Adjust seasonings to taste and cook 30 minutes more, adding broth or water as needed to keep the stew thick but still moist.

IRISH SODA BREAD

2-1/2 cups flour
1 tsp. baking powder
1/2 tsp. baking soda
1/2 tsp. salt
4 Tbsp. sugar
1 Tbsp. caraway seeds
5 Tbsp. butter
1-1/2 cups mixed dark and golden raisins
3/4 cup buttermilk

Mix 2 cups flour with the baking powder, soda, salt, three tablespoons sugar and caraway seeds. Cut three tablespoons of butter into the dry mix until it takes on the texture of oatmeal. Add the raisins and then slowly blend in the buttermilk – the mix will form a slightly sticky ball of dough. Place the dough on

a work surface and knead in an additional half cup of flour. Place the ball of dough in a buttered, round 8-inch cake pan. Brush the top of the dough with two tablespoons of melted butter and sprinkle with remaining sugar. Bake in a preheated, 350-degree oven for 30 minutes. Cool in the pan for 5 minutes; then unmold onto a cake rack until the bread reaches room temperature. To reheat, wrap the bread in foil and bake at 250 degrees for 10 minutes.

GUINNESS CHOCOLATE CAKE

For the cake:

2 cups Guinness stout
4 sticks butter
1-1/2 cups unsweetened cocoa powder
4 cups all-purpose flour
4 cups sugar
1 Tbsp. baking soda
1-1/2 tsp. salt
4 eggs
1-1/3 cups sour cream

For the icing:

2 cups heavy cream, whipped
1 lb. bittersweet chocolate, shaved or finely chopped

Bring the Guinness and butter to a simmer in a large saucepan. Once the butter has melted, add the cocoa powder and blend until smooth. Cool.

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What's cookin'

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Serving nine counties, Hospice & Palliative Care of Charlotte is the largest, most comprehensive provider of hospice and palliative medicine in the region and the only independent, nonprofit hospice provider in Mecklenburg County. Soup on Sunday is one of the organization's major fund-raising events. This year, the event was held at the Citizens Center of Central Piedmont Community College's main campus Jan. 28. Thirty-eight soups were offered to 716 guests in attendance. Thirty-six restaurants and four culinary schools participated in the event, raising \$28,000 for Hospice & Palliative Care.



Photo courtesy of HPCC

Chef Adam Reed of Sante and daughter Erin serve at Soup on Sunday.



Aura Dining & Bar, located at 207 Johnston Drive in Pineville, is celebrating its grand opening as chef John Arsenault offers his own style of New American cuisine with Italian-, Latin- and Asian-influenced techniques.

Aura's appetizers feature dishes such as Asian fried calamari served with a spicy red chili-peanut sauce, empanadas filled with spiced beef and olives and served with honey-chipotle sauce, and olives and mozzarella marinated in a citrus-herb-garlic olive oil. Entrées include offerings such as black tea-smoked duckling with an orange-soy-ginger sauce; macadamia nut-crusted salmon in a ginger-soy butter sauce; and *entraña*, a grilled skirt steak basted with garlic-herb oil served with a Chimichurri sauce.

Located in downtown Pineville, one mile west of Carolina Place Mall, Aura has seating for almost 150 people on two floors and an outdoor patio. Restaurant hours are Tuesday through Thursday, 4:30-9:30 p.m., and Friday and Saturday, 4:30-10:30 p.m. For reservations or information, call 704-644-8007 or visit www.auradiningnc.com.



On Monday, March 19, the Oaxacan Cooking and Cocktail Class at Cantina 1511 in Stonecrest Shopping Center will give participants a taste of why the Mexican region is renowned for cuisine. Owner Frank Scibelli and Cantina's chef, Richard Buchsbaum, will host the culinary event, which features a three-course dinner beginning at 7 p.m. Angela Hess will demonstrate several signature cocktails that pair perfectly with the Oaxacan dishes. Cost is \$45 per person, plus tax and gratuity. To reserve a space in the class, call 704-752-9797. The restaurant, located at 7708 Rea Road, opens daily at 11 a.m. and serves until 10 p.m. Sunday through Wednesday and until 11 p.m. Thursday through Saturday. Sunday brunch is offered from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Irish

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In another bowl, combine flour, sugar, baking soda and salt. Beat eggs and sour cream together in a separate bowl. Add chocolate mixture to eggs and sour cream. Add the flour mixture and beat just until all ingredients are combined. Divide the batter equally among three 8-inch cake pans that have been buttered, floured and lined with a round of parchment paper. Bake on middle rack of a preheated, 350-degree oven about 35 minutes. Cool cakes in the pans for 10-15 minutes; turn cakes out onto a cake rack and cool completely.

While cakes cool, bring the cream to a simmer in a medium saucepan. Remove from heat, add chocolate and blend until completely dissolved and mixture is thick and smooth. Refrigerate until icing reaches a spreadable consistency, about two hours.

Spread icing on top of two layers. Stack those layers and top with the third. Finish by icing top and sides of cake.

Want to go green?

The St. Patrick's Day Parade begins Saturday, March 17, at 11 a.m. at the corner of Tryon and Stonewall streets before proceeding north on Tryon Street. The parade's organizers say audiences can expect to see traditional bagpipe bands, floats, various organizations and Irish dancers marching with recreation-center drill teams and neighborhood associations.

During and after the parade, enjoy the 2007 Charlotte Goes Green Festival anchored on the corner of Tryon and Third streets. Festival hours are 10 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. Highlights include Irish music and dance performances, bagpipers, food, vendors and beverages. Admission is free, and booths will sell tickets redeemable for food and drink at vendors' tents. Patrons wishing to purchase alcoholic beverages must present identification to receive a free bracelet identifying the wearer as 21 or older. The festival and parade will take place rain or shine. □