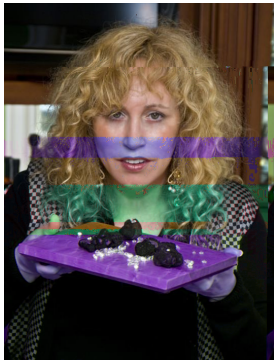


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Hannah Carroll, DelmarvaNow 12:16 p.m. EDT April 24, 2015



Susan Alexander was always an easy mom to shop for during the holidays.

She only desired truffles.

But not the kind of shiny wrappers filled with a ganache center.

Alexander wanted the musky, earthy, aromatic fungi that sell for \$1,500 a pound.

"Truffles are often called the diamonds of the kitchen," she said. "Taste one and you'll understand why."

She doesn't have to ask family for the edible diamonds anymore — Alexander now has the largest commercial truffle orchard in America and the second largest in the world in [Pinehurst, North Carolina](#).

She kicked off a new national tour — Let There Be Truffles — this week in coastal Delaware, teaming up with SoDel Concepts chefs Jason Dietterick of Bluecoast, [Chris Parks](#) of Lupo Di Mare Cucina and Maurice Catlett of Fish On for a three-day dinner event.

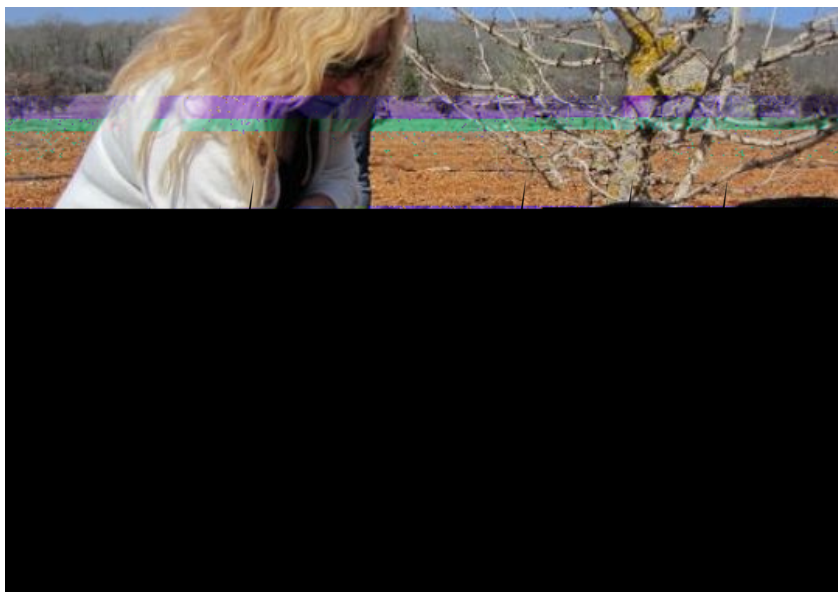
Tickets for each night were \$75 and all of the proceeds solely benefited Meals on Wheels of Lewes-Rehoboth. The Fish On kitchen teamed up with Meals on Wheels last October, taking on the responsibility of serving 200 home-bound residents three meals a day, 365 days a year.

Scott Krammamer, SoDel Concepts president, said the truffle event was a very 'SoDel thing to do'.

"This company is all about two things: making really good food out of simple ingredients and always giving back to the community," he said. "She wanted to do both with us. Of course we were in."

Alexander chose Delaware for her tour's first stop for a couple of reasons. But her decision to benefit the local Meals on Wheels chapter was a little more personal.

"My mother received nourishment from Meals on Wheels the few years before she died," she said. "But it wasn't just food. Their kindness and compassion fed her soul. What they do is wonderful."



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Her journey to becoming a truffle cultivator was not a lifelong dream. It just sort of happened, she said.

"In three weeks, my mother passed away, a best friend died and a good friend who was a top Realtor said, 'I've got some land you need to look at ... I'll come pick you up.' So I went."

Alexander had such a good feeling about the property, she immediately bought the 90 acres. Over time, she acquired another 190 acres.

"They've told me all of my property once belonged to a farmer," she said. "A tractor accident left him paralyzed so he was forced to divide up his land and sell it to different families. It's nice to know it's all back together."

Alexander decided to use her 280 acres to grow her favorite holiday gift.

But not just any truffle.

She wanted to grow the most sought-after truffle in France: the Black Diamond French Perigord, often called 'The Queen of Truffles'.

The idea was risky, she said. Truffles are extremely difficult to harvest, which is why their price tag is so high. They require 8 to 13 years to mature and only grow on roots of trees, making them almost impossible to find since they are typically 12 inches underground.

Luckily, truffles develop an intense aroma that pigs and dogs can smell to dig up. Alexander trained her sheepadoodle, Pepé, to find the buried fungi by rubbing truffle oil in his puppy bowl. She didn't have to do much training with her two pigs — Charlie and Miss Piggy — since swine are naturally drawn to the scent of a mature truffle and can find them quickly.

Alexander does, however, have to be careful that Charlie and Miss Piggy don't eat all of the profits.

"They love truffles as much as I do," she said.

With the help of her truffle hunters, Alexander is finally starting to dig up the fruits of her labor — and the world is taking notice.

She has been featured in countless media publications like USA Today, The New York Times, Wall Street Journal and Fox Business News and has made appearances on several popular television and radio talk shows.

She distributes her truffle products around the world and works with master chefs, truffle experts, universities and farmers.

"Truffles are not for the impatient," she said. "Growing them is a notoriously tricky feat and even if all the conditions are met, there is no guarantee they will grow. But just like everything else in life that doesn't come easy, the reward for persistence and faith is that much greater."

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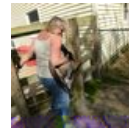
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