

Cape Gazette
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THE BUSINESS OF EATING

Let there be truffles!

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Source: Submitted

You can't throw a Yukon Gold potato around here without hitting a plate that's been laced with essence of truffle. Truffle fries at Nage. The Focaccia Robiola pizza at Touch of Italy is drizzled with olive oil spiked with truffle. James Beard-nominated chef Hari Cameron never met a truffle he didn't like. JAM Bistro offers baked truffle mac 'n' cheese as an appetizer. The pea risotto at Michy's Relaxed Dining is infused with truffle oil. Lisa Frampton's wild mushroom pizza at Pig & Fish Restaurant Company blends roasted garlic aioli with a drop of truffle oil. This list is certainly not comprehensive, but you get the idea.

A truffle is the fruit of an underground mushroom that thrives on or near tree roots. Because they're often up to 12 inches below the ground, truffles are traditionally harvested using pigs and trained dogs. Pigs love the

smell of truffles and locate them quickly. They also like the taste, so they have to be watched closely to make sure they don't eat up the profits (not unlike me at my last restaurant). Interestingly, dogs couldn't care less about the aroma, but respond well to training that helps them unearth the little orbs. At up to \$2,000 a pound, truffles are often thought of as being foreign and difficult to use.

One woman is working hard to change that perception. Susan Alexander is the owner of Susan Alexander Truffle products and Black Diamond French Truffles - the largest truffle orchard in the U.S. Her farm near Pinehurst, N.C., is becoming what she calls "the next Napa Valley of truffle," and she spreads the word not only on her informative blog (SusanAlexander-truffles.com) but in USA Today, Fox Business News, Weight Watchers Magazine, The New York Times, and The Wall Street Journal, to name a few.

So, you might ask (and I sincerely hope you do...), what does all this have to do with the Cape Region of Sussex County? Well, Susan Alexander is not only a clever and talented entrepreneur, but she is also generous. When she heard of Meals on Wheels Lewes-Rehoboth's efforts to feed our homebound neighbors in Rehoboth, Lewes and Harbeson, she loaded up her kit bag with truffle butter, truffle salt, truffle popcorn and a king's ransom in the little scented orbs and will join SoDel Concepts chefs Doug Ruley, Maurice Catlett and Chris Parks April 21 to 23 to create three truffle-laced dining extravaganzas.

On Tuesday, April 21, Bluecoast in Bethany Beach will dish up truffled steak frites, popcorn

grits, a shaved truffle poutine and plums with truffle honey. Wednesday will be Rehoboth's turn when Lupo di Mare serves black truffle arancini, mushroom risotto, tuna crudo with truffle vinaigrette, truffled guinea hen and olive oil cake with truffle gelato. Trufflephiles in Lewes will top off this trio of tantalizing tastes at Fish On, when truffle honey is drizzled over fried sweetbreads, lobster dumplings are treated to a dollop of truffle cream, and sweet corn ice cream is sprinkled with truffled popcorn. The menu items are just hints, and Susan, Doug, Maurice and Chris promise lots of aromatic surprises.

During the meals, Ms. Alexander will join the chefs and diners in a discussion of the various appetizers, entrees and desserts. She will demystify the fabulous fungus once and for all to make it more approachable in kitchens at home.

Call 302-537-0100 to reserve your place at Bluecoast, and 302-226-2240 to enjoy the truffled treats at Lupo di Mare. Tables at Fish On can be reserved by calling 302-645-9790. It all goes to benefit your local Meals on Wheels Lewes-Rehoboth, and every penny raised will stay right here in Sussex County. So mark your calendars!

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These "diamonds of the kitchen" are in the same league as such high-ticket items as French champagne, caviar and Iberico ham. Now you can enjoy those diamonds three days in a row, April 21 to 23.

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