Mack’s Works Wonders

Wardensville’s hot new restaurant serves good food—and the youth in its community.

written by FOOD EDITOR STEVEN KEITH

Sometimes, a restaurant is more than just a place to eat. At Mack’s Bingo Kitchen in Wardensville, it’s so much more.

The state’s Best New Restaurant in the 2023 WV Living Best of West Virginia awards not only serves up exceptional dining experiences for guests but also serves area youth by inviting them to shadow its staff to gain valuable experience in the hospitality industry—and a better understanding of the job opportunities it offers.

The restaurant accomplishes this through its association with Farms Work Wonders, a nonprofit social enterprise whose mission is to ignite the spark of curiosity in Appalachian youth so they see themselves and their futures in new and exciting ways. Walk in the doors of Mack’s Bingo Kitchen, and you’ll be greeted by “Junior Crew” members tagging along with hosts, servers, bussers, dishwashers, and cooks to see how each of those positions contributes to the overall success of the restaurant.

“We provide a supportive, yet challenging environment where we can teach specific job skills,” says Culinary Director Seth Wells. He joined Farms Work Wonders back in November 2021 to help open the new restaurant, which joins a bakery, farm, and market under the nonprofit’s youth-enrichment umbrella. “By winning these businesses into living classrooms, we’re able to create career experiences and opportunities for young people.”

Only open since mid-August, Mack’s Bingo Kitchen has already expanded its hours to include lunch service, thanks to a community that has welcomed its food—and its purpose—with open arms. And that food? Wells describes the place as an approachable American restaurant that utilizes seasonal ingredients from the Farms Work Wonders organic farm and others nearby.

“You will see influences from our team’s collective Italian and Greek cooking backgrounds as well as techniques, ingredients, and inspiration from Appalachia, along with anything else that inspires us.”

That inspiration leads to such creations as Grilled Virginia Oysters with green garlic butter, lemon, and bread crumbs; Greek “Stuffed” Cornbread stuffed with kâdi, Swiss chard, feta, and chilled buttermilk; and Charred Cabbage served with tomatoes and white wine. Heartier appetites can dig into a Grilled Whole Tibet with roasted winter squash, pumpkin seeds, browned butter, and sage; a Grilled Half Chicken with roasted potatoes and farm greens; or a Local Po’ Boy Plate with flat dumplings, kil’l greens, and sorghum vinaigrette.

Plates are designed to be shared, Wells explains, so folks can “order a smattering of everything” to try with friends. He says guests can’t get enough of the Mack’s Burger, which is made with local beef ground in-house and topped with homemade pickles, farm lettuce, and sauce on a homemade buttermilk brioche bun. The Fried Chicken Sandwich with “ramp” dressing is a hit, too, and popular sides include fried potatoes with herb mays and roasted beets.

“My current favorite sides are the fried pickled green tomatoes and hash puppies,” he adds. “Both are made with organic produce grown on our farm. Pair that with a West Virginia Snow Dog, and I’m set.”

He says the first round of youth in the program went wild over Chef Vinnie Falcone’s pimento cheese, which they just added to their new lunch menu on a grilled cheese. “Pro tip: Add a slice of Kit’s Country Ham to it for one of the best sandwiches around.”

Wells, who grew up in North Carolina, is grateful for the opportunity to make a real difference in Hardy County. “I saw a great opportunity to join Farms Work Wonders to work with the next generation of folks in the hospitality industry. It’s an opportunity to create an amazing experience for our guests and for each other in an uplifting and fun environment.”

Visit the restaurants’ social media pages and website for more information.

Mack’s Bingo Kitchen

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