

When You Come to a Fork in the Road, Take It

Chef Tim Groody cooks from local farms at Fork!

TEXT BY CHARLOTTE CULINARY EXPERT **HEIDI BILLOTTO** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **GERIN CHOINIÈRE**



Sourwood Honey butter poached shrimp Fall vegetable fattoush

Chef Timothy Groody came to Charlotte in October of 1997, inspired by the work of Alice Waters and others he had worked with in California. He entered the Charlotte restaurant arena ready to make a difference. While other local chefs were supporting local farms, it was Groody who was given the moniker as Charlotte's first farm to fork chef as he was the first chef in the area to ever put a farmer's name on a menu.

I can still remember the thrill and excitement I saw in farmer Denise Smart when she saw her name printed on the menu. Today, almost 20 years later, Denise Smart still sells herbs and produce at the Yorkmont Road Regional Farmers Market from her Nise's Herbs stand, and Tim still buys from her for his menu. "We're here from tax time to turkey time," she used to joke; but the farms run all year long, and Tim and other area chefs buy as long as

farmers have product available.

Through the years, Tim Groody has opened many a Charlotte area restaurant including LaVecchia's, Sonoma in all its incarnations, Pie Town and Taverna 100. He was executive chef for a while at Davidson's Flatiron Kitchen and Tap House, and then executive chef for the FS Food Group during which time he helped to open Pacos Tacos and Midwood Smokehouse.



Crispy Duck Leg and Wing with Chipotle Quince Sauce, bacon red cabbage apple slaw

No doubt Groody can cook in a vast array of styles, but the concept of his own farm to fork establishment has always been his dream. Tim met his wife and business partner Melanie McIntosh when Tim was working as executive chef at The Flatiron in Davidson – they shared a vision and found a little house on Main Street in Cornelius. Unfortunately the property was not available then, but as soon as it was, the couple jumped. Tim left the world of working as someone else’s executive chef and started making dreams a reality.

Fork! opened on August 17, 2013. The old farm style home with the big front porch and small intimate dining areas typifies Tim’s cooking style of cooking comfortably – letting flavors just be, using what’s fresh current and in season. The interior of the house turned restaurant is done in repurposed farm wood. It’s a charming little spot – with high quality service offered in the front of the house and a delicious assortment of perfectly prepared daily fare coming out of the kitchen.

“While I do believe strongly in supporting local farms – for me it’s more than just that – it matters to me how produce is grown and how proteins are raised. I want it to be sustainable and farmed naturally or organically – if it’s not, even though it’s local – I will walk away,” Groody explained, adding, “it’s really all about the quality of the product.” Tim’s long time fans get it – he has a strong following in our area and with good reason. Whatever he cooks, it’s incredibly well done. “Melanie and I do it together. Our customers are our friends, and we love that they spend their time here with us.”

Hard to talk specifics on the Fork! menu as it changes from day to day, but there is always a local cheese plate and several small bites on the menu to begin. Follow the starters with a host of sustainable seafood and local beef, chicken and pork offerings. Salads, soups and fish of the day round out the menu; plus be sure to enjoy the well stocked bar and Fork’s healthy selection of wines and beers.

On Sundays enjoy a delightful Sunday brunch,

and if the weather is good, do eat out on the porch. All egg dishes are made with Harmony Ridge free range eggs and range from a hearty grass fed beef burger to a Daily Benedict to cheddar herb biscuits and gravy. And may I say that the lobster mac and cheese is not to be missed.

On Saturday mornings if you can keep up the pace, it’s fun to run into Tim at local farmers’ markets and see what he has in his shopping bags for the week. He starts at the Matthews market around 8:00 with stops at the Yorkmont Road Regional Market and Atherton Mill Market – gotta move fast as he’s usually back in the kitchen around 11:00.

Follow Fork! – and lots of the farms Groody supports at Fork! on social media: On FaceBook at Fork Restaurant or at Timothy Groody; on Twitter @ForkCornelius and on Instagram at ForkCornelius.

Fork! is located at 20517 N Main St Cornelius, NC 28031. Call for reservations at 704.655.7465 or visit ForkDining.com for more information.



Frangelico Creme Anglaise, Minted Mascarpone, Lemon Grass whip

Fork! Restaurant owner and Chef Tim Groody on working with local farms and farmers.

“Here are just some of the farms that work tirelessly to bring you fresh produce, cheese, beef, lamb, pork and chicken. I have been fortunate to work with these farmers and develop relationships that go deeper than farm to Fork! It is hard to find people more passionate about the food you are about to eat. Here at Fork! we hope you enjoy their hard work. Local seasons change on a daily basis. We integrate these products when and as Mother Nature allows.”

- New Town Farms** – Melinda & Sammy; Certified Organic
- Nise’s Herb’s** – Denise & Steve Smart; Natural Farming
- Laughing Owl Farms** – Dean and & Jennifer Mullis; Natural Farming
- New Beginning Farms** – Donnie Cline; Natural Farming
- Little Bit Of Heaven** – Lily & Barry; Natural Farming
- Carrigan Farms** – Doug & Kelly Carrigan
- Coldwater Creek Farms** – Brad Hinckley; Natural Farming
- Rosemary Pete** – Pete Vinci; Natural Farming
- Baucom’s Best** – Milton & Harriot; Baucom 100% Grassfed Beef
- Mills Family Farm** – Nicole Mills; Pasture Raised/Hormone /Antibiotic Free
- Wild Turkey Farms** – Lee & Domisty Menius; Pasture Raised/Hormone/
Antibiotic Free
- Charlotte Fish Company** - Tim Griner – sustainable seafood
- Cackleberry Farms** – Randy Fisher; low temperature pasteurized artisan cheese
- Lucky Leaf** – Kate Brun; Micorgreens
- Coto Farms** – Karin and Rene Coto; Natural Farming
- BlueBird Farm** – Marie and William; Natural farming/pasture raised
hormone/ antibiotic free
- Gilcrest Natural Farm** – Gil and Amy Foster; Pasture raised hormone/
antibiotic free
- A Way of Life Farm** – Jamie and Sara Jane; Natural Farming/pasture raised
Hormone/antibiotic free
- Rowlands Row** – Dani and Joe Goldfischer; Natural Farming
- Hoffman Heritage and Heirloom** – Andre and Loren Fernandez; Natural
farming heirloom produce
- Underwood Family Farm** – Christy and Michael; Natural Farming/ pasture
raised Hormone/antibiotic free

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