

Local chefs share recipes for your Thanksgiving table

Get to know 3 local chefs by digging into their recipe files

By Lisa McKinnon

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One is a vegan. Another is retooling a menu to make it all about steaks and seafood. A third is a longshoreman who also works in the kitchen at a private yacht club in Oxnard.

All are Ventura County chefs whom you might not have met just yet, for reasons that range from newness on the job to access to their respective dining rooms.

But that's about to change, as each shares a Thanksgiving-ready recipe here by way of introduction. For those who don't feel like cooking on Nov. 28, face-to-face meetings with two of the featured chefs can be arranged: They're called holiday-dinner reservations, and they come with turkey and all the trimmings.

NICK WHITE

The dish: Vegan Raw Mashed "Potatoes"

The chef: White, 25, is executive chef and general manager at Midtown Cafe in Ventura. Formerly known as Crazy Doctor Cafe, the informal, order-at-the-counter spot near Community Memorial Hospital and the Ventura County Medical Center still serves coffee, fresh juices, fruit smoothies and an assortment of wraps. But White, who is a vegan with raw-food leanings, has added several options to the menu that are in keeping with his own preference for plant-based fare. "It just feels healthier to me," he said.

Culinary background: A longtime Venturan, White lived in Arizona just long enough to go through the pastry program at Le Cordon Bleu in Scottsdale. He has worked in positions ranging from dishwasher to sous chef at Mary's Secret Garden and the Pierpont Inn, both in Ventura.

Thoughts on Thanksgiving: "(It's) a very inspiring time for re-creating all the food I remember sharing with my family. But I like to get past all the talk about gaining holiday weight and go straight for all the flavor with no negative connotation needed," he said.

Holiday hours: Midtown Cafe will not be open on Thanksgiving. Regular hours cover breakfast, lunch and early dinner most days of the week, with late-night dining from 10 p.m. to 3 a.m. Fridays and Saturdays (2991 E. Loma Vista Road, Suite C, Ventura, 643-0800).

VEGAN RAW MASHED 'POTATOES'

INGREDIENTS

1 cup raw, unsalted cashews

— Himalayan sea salt, to taste

— Pepper, to taste

¼ teaspoon chopped fresh rosemary

1 pound cauliflower (about 2/3 of a head, cut into pieces)

— Juice of 1 lemon

1 tablespoon soy, chickpea or buckwheat miso (optional)

¼ cup nutritional yeast (available at natural and health food stores)

— Water, as desired

1-2 cloves garlic (optional)

1 tablespoon cold-pressed olive oil

DIRECTIONS

1 Place cashews, salt and pepper into a food processor and process until powdery.

2 Place rosemary, cauliflower, lemon juice, miso and nutritional yeast in the processor and blend. Gradually add a small amount of water in a thin stream to help loosen the mixture, as needed. If you love garlic mashed potatoes, add a clove or two of garlic.

3 Stop to scrape the sides of the processor and add olive oil for creaminess. Serve as a side dish.

GEORG PAULUSSEN

The dish: My Favorite German (Goose) Turkey Recipe

The chef: Paulussen, 48, is the executive chef at the Ojai Valley Inn & Spa. On the job since July, Paulussen oversees the seven restaurants and cafes that dot the property. He is ramping up the farm-to-table theme at the Oak Grill, the casual outdoor space that overlooks the 10th tee on the inn's golf course. Diners at the white-tablecloth

Maravilla restaurant, meanwhile, will detect a growing focus on steaks and seafood that will be complete when a 2,000-degree broiler is added to the kitchen.

Culinary background: Born in Germany, Paulussen grew up in Adendorf, a village he described as “having more cows than people.” He held his first culinary internship at 15 before moving on to posts in London, Tokyo and Nassau. Paulussen has served as executive chef at The Venetian and Trump International Hotel in Las Vegas in addition to operating his own catering company.

Thoughts on Thanksgiving: “I was 23 when I came to New York. All I could say in English was ‘Hi’ and ‘Hello.’ I didn’t know anything about turkeys, but when Thanksgiving came just three months later, that’s all anyone talked about,” Paulussen said with a laugh. “I’ve learned how to make it over the years. I’ve adjusted to it. I like a nice smoked turkey or roasted turkey for cold cuts the next day.”

Holiday hours: Paulussen and the inn’s culinary team will be open for business on Thanksgiving. Plated, three-course, prix fixe meals will be served at Maravilla and the Oak Grill (\$55 per person, call for hours), while a grand buffet featuring a raw bar, a flatbread pizza bar and more traditional fare (green bean casserole, whole-baked turkeys) will be available from noon to 6:30 p.m. Nov. 28 in the ballroom (\$72 per person, \$30 for children ages 4 to 12). (905 Country Club Road, 646-1111, <http://www.ojairesort.com>).

MY FAVORITE GERMAN (GOOSE) TURKEY RECIPE

Ingredients

For the marinade:

1 12-to-14 pound goose or turkey

½ cup Dijon mustard

1 cup syrah or pinot noir

¼ ounce dried sage

½ cup orange blossom or wild berry honey

— Salt and pepper

For the filling:

3 twigs fresh thyme, plus leaves for additional seasoning

½ ounce fresh sage

1 orange, peeled and quartered

1 apple, peeled, cored and quartered

1 cup finely chopped roasted chestnuts

½ cup raisins

½ cup onions, finely chopped

½ cup celery, finely chopped

½ cup carrots, finely chopped

— Salt and pepper

For the stuffing:

1 cup breadcrumbs

2 eggs

DIRECTIONS

1 Place the goose or turkey with the mustard, wine, sage, honey and plenty of salt and pepper in a sturdy plastic bag or similar container. Put in the refrigerator and allow to marinate for about 24 hours.

2 Preheat oven to 350 degrees

3 Combine the filling ingredients in a bowl and spoon into the cavity of the goose or turkey. (For ease of removal later, place filling in a food-safe, cotton produce bag before adding to cavity.) Place the bird in a large cast-iron pot or roasting pan. Season with salt, pepper and additional fresh thyme, if desired. Place the pot or pan into the oven and bake for about 2 1/2 hours, or until golden brown, basting every 30 minutes or so with the pan drippings.

4 Cover the bird loosely with aluminum foil to prevent skin from turning too dark and bake for another 30 minutes to an hour, continuing to baste as you go.

5 Once the bird reaches an internal temperature of 170 degrees and is fully cooked, use the pan drippings and filling to make stuffing. Remove the filling from the bird and mix half of it and half of the drippings with the breadcrumbs and eggs. Place the mixture in a greased baking dish and bake until crispy on top.

6 You can use the remaining filling and drippings to make a sauce cooked in a pot with salt, pepper, port and Dijon mustard; bring to a boil before tasting or serving to avoid the possibility of cross contamination from undercooked poultry juices.

ERNIE BORJAS

The chef: Borjas, 32, is the executive chef at The Yacht Club at Channel Islands Harbor. Located near the Whitesails development on Tradewinds Drive in Oxnard, the

club is private but welcomes the public for by-appointment visits and special occasions like Thanksgiving. More about that in a minute.

The dish: Mexican Candied Yams with Marshmallow Frosting. Borjas got the yam part of the recipe more than a decade ago from an elderly neighbor he described as “the quintessential, from-scratch cook.” It calls for blanching the yams so they get a jump-start on cooking but don’t turn to total mush later, Borjas said. It also calls for piloncillo, or unrefined sugar pressed into a cone shape. (Sometimes called panela, the cones are commonly found at Mexican markets and in plastic boxes in the produce section at some mainstream markets like Vons.) The marshmallow frosting is a new addition, inspired by a dish Borjas created last month using the same mystery-box list of ingredients given to club members participating in a “Chopped”-style cooking contest.

Culinary background: A 1999 graduate of Rio Mesa High School who pitched for baseball teams at Oxnard College and Point Park University in Pittsburgh, Borjas was working as a longshoreman at the Port of Hueneme when the recession hit and his hours were cut. Inspired by a lifelong love of cooking, he attended Le Cordon Bleu in Pasadena while working with chef Tim Kilcoyne at the now-closed SideCar restaurant in Ventura. He helped open the club last year, after a stint at the Ventura Beach Marriott. Borjas continues to work two or three days a week as a longshoreman, unloading shipments of everything from bananas to BMWs.

Thoughts on Thanksgiving: “Holidays can get wild in our family. My dad is one of eight kids and my wife is one of 6, so before I started working at restaurants we sometimes spent the whole day driving around visiting everyone,” Borjas said. These days, he and wife Janett Borjas and their three children, ages 1 to 10, often celebrate with a comparatively quiet meal at home on his next available day off.

Holiday hours: Yams will be on the menu with ham, turkey, cranberry-orange-walnut relish, baked potato salad and pumpkin pie when the club welcomes members and visitors alike for Thanksgiving dinner from 1-3 p.m. Nov. 28. For information and required reservations, \$39 per person, send email to the club’s executive director, Anita Mays, at anita@theyachtclub.us.

MEXICAN CANDIED YAMS WITH MARSHMALLOW FROSTING

INGREDIENTS

For the yams

3 pounds yams, peeled and cut into 2-inch squares

2 cups orange juice

2 8-ounce piloncillos, roughly chopped (may substitute 1 cup dark brown sugar and 1 tablespoon molasses for each 8-ounce piloncillo)

½ teaspoon cinnamon

½ teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg

½ stick (4 tablespoons) unsalted butter

1 teaspoon salt

For the frosting

4 ounces marshmallows

1 14-ounce can sweetened condensed milk

4 ounces heavy cream

1 tablespoon vanilla extract

DIRECTIONS

1 Bring a large pot of salted water to boil. Add the prepared yams and cook for 3 to 5 minutes. Remove the yams from the boiling water and immediately place them in a bowl of ice water to halt the cooking process.

2 In a separate bowl, combine the orange juice, piloncillo pieces, spices, butter and salt. Cook over medium-high heat in a large pot for 5 to 10 minutes, or until the piloncillo pieces have liquefied. Drain the yams and add them to the liquid. Reduce the heat to low-medium, cover the pot and simmer for 30 to 45 minutes, stirring occasionally to keep the yams from sticking to the pot. Yams are done when their edges are soft but the center resists a bit when poked with the tip of a sharp knife.

3 For the frosting, combine the marshmallows, milk, heavy cream and vanilla extract in a sauce pan and cook over low heat until the ingredients have melted together. Turn off the heat.

4 Transfer the yams to a serving dish and drizzle with the cooled frosting. Garnish with additional whole marshmallows, if desired.



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