

'FARM TO TABLE': TDC promotes the area's sustainable eats and Gulf to visitors (PHOTOS)

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A good many media representatives from other markets came down for the recent Sandestin Wine Festival. South Walton's Tourist Development Council took advantage of their presence to show off the synergy between our acclaimed local chefs, farmers and fishermen.

The TDC, Chan's Wine World, and Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort hosted a Farm & Sea to Table Media Brunch April 30 on the terrace of the Grand Sandestin.

During the brunch, four local chefs designed one course of the four-course brunch to pair with a Charles Krug wine.

The chefs included Roy Khoo, executive chef for Sandestin Investments; Crystal Castillo, executive chef at Tommy Bahama Café Grand Boulevard; Alan Baltazar, formerly of Café Tango, now executive chef and partner at Cuvee Bistro; and Yascha Becker of Sandestin Golf & Beach Resort.

Khoo designed the first course: a Florida "Toad in a Hole," using organic egg and Gulf shrimp.

Castillo's second course was Grits & Grillades featuring locally-raised angus beef from Cypress Cattle Company, with goat cheese and squash blossoms.

Baltazar and Chef Tim Creehan teamed up to create chilled white asparagus soup with jumbo crab morsels and roasted red pepper served with local pompano on baby arugula.

Becker created fresh fruit sorbet in a variety of flavors.

"Every chef here has a passion for using local ingredients," said Tracy Louthain, TDC director of communications.

According to Louthain, area chefs share the philosophy of locally-sourced ingredients and work to create their menus from food sourced within a 100 mile radius and their menus change regularly to represent what is fresh and in season.

"The chefs all tell similar stories of waking up each morning and calling local fishermen on the docks to discuss what is coming in fresh that day to plan their menus. The same holds true for produce," she said.

For Castillo, that means creating a partnership with Cypress family farm in Jay and Ocheese Dairy Farm in Blountstown.

"As often as possible we try to use local produce as well as local seafood," said Khoo. "In fact, Sandestin is currently working with a local organic farmer to grow for us some special items. Sandestin's culinary teams, particularly in the restaurants and clubs try to regularly feature local seafood and foods, as featured items in their menus and specials."

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Creehan agreed that his goal is to purchase everything he can from a local grower or fish market, but he said a lot of local suppliers are not big enough to supply all the restaurants.

Creehan partners with Destin Ice House for seafood and Dragonfly Farm in DeFuniak Springs for produce, as well as a tomato man who drives down from South Georgia.

"It's getting better by the day, but we are not yet farm to table," he said.

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