



DINING OUT

By Bea and Ben Sorrencified

There are many restaurants in our area that enjoy an excellent reputation throughout the Crystal Coast. Most of us would have no difficulty naming them since we frequent them throughout the year, perhaps especially during the fall and winter months when the tourists are few and far between. Not many area restaurants, however, have a reputation well beyond the Crystal Coast, throughout the South and even nationally. One that does is the Beaufort Grocery Company. It has been featured, with good reason, in magazines circulating widely in the South and well beyond.

The Beaufort Grocery Company justly describes itself as having the "subtle grace and charm" of a "French country bistro." Charles and Wendy Park opened the restaurant in 1991. Charles, a graduate of the well-renowned Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, New York, is the restaurant's executive chef, and Wendy is the pastry chef. Both provide superbly prepared dishes for the restaurant's many local and visiting patrons.

We are often drawn to the Grocery Company for lunch and dinner. Both menus feature a combination of interestingly prepared coastal favorites and inventive other dishes that will please most palates.

The lunch menu includes homemade soups, salads and deli-style sandwiches. Gumbo is almost always a soup option, as are delicious daily soup choices. Salads are freshly prepared. You may choose a Caesar, Cobb or garden salad. Especially delectable are the Grecian salad and the Indo-Asian salad. The Grecian salad has feta cheese, olives, onions, beets, tomatoes and pepperoncini peppers placed on a bed of assorted greens. The wonderfully inventive Indo-Asian salad consists of assorted greens with grilled chicken, fried wontons, water chestnuts, julienne vegetables, red pepper and peanuts tossed in a sesame vinaigrette. For variety, most of the salads can be ordered "twisted in a lavosh wrap." (Lavosh is a middle-eastern flat bread.) Another almost unique "salad" offering is a gougere—a parmesan-flavored pastry filled with chicken, shrimp, or egg and bacon salad. For salad-seekers, these choices will present a

clear dilemma of what to select. The solution is to come again (and again).

Sandwiches offered for lunch at the Grocery Company have names as intriguing as their ingredients. The "Holla' Back," for instance, is ham and pimento cheese with tomato on sourdough bread. The "Sonnamabeach" joins cappicola ham and salami with provolone and mozzarella cheeses, topped with grilled onions, grilled peppers and field greens, finished with a garlic and herb aioli—all on crusty bread. And the "Fuhged-daboudit" combines shaved turkey with roasted red pepper, chevre (a goat's milk cheese), bacon, seasonal greens, and peach and onion relish. (Despite their names, we can't imagine that the last two sandwiches were ever served in New Jersey!) Beyond these options, the menu includes sandwiches with more regional flair—and names. Consider, for example, the "Reuben Willis from Down-East," or the "Apple Granny," or the "Sumpin's Jumpin" or "Ms. Abby's Crabby." (We'll let you guess what the main ingredients are in these options.) All the sandwiches are accompanied by a choice of side dishes, including pasta or potato salad, sweet potato chips and seasonal or fresh fruit salad. Whether you select a soup, a salad or a sandwich, you will surely enjoy the well-prepared luncheon fare.

Dinner at the Grocery Company is a wonderful culinary experience from appetizers through dessert. We especially enjoy the Saganaki, an appetizer dish made with kasseri cheese flamed in brandy and served with fresh bread. (This Greek phenomenon is spectacularly presented at your table and is definitely meant to be shared.) Other appetizers include seafood burros (grilled flour tortillos rolled with shrimp, scallops, spinach and mozzarella cheese served with pico de gallo, salsa verde and sour cream); hot gorgonzola cheese and spinach dip (served with grilled pita and lavosh crackers); and an ahi tuna napoleon (seared yellow-fin tuna with crispy wontons, wasabi cole slaw, pickled ginger, cilantro, and sesame and sweet garlic sauce). With a glass of wine, any of these appetizers is a great "starter" for the evening's meal.

Entree choices are equally tempting, from meat to fowl to fish and seafood. For a French touch, you might try the chicken boucouse, consisting of two grilled free-range chicken breasts served over stewed leeks and cream. For Italian flavor, you might prefer the veal scallopini milano, sauteed veal cutlets with sopressatta and fresh mozzarella cheese that is presented over capellini with mushrooms, roasted tomato, and brandy. If you have a taste for duck, you might order the sliced pan-seared duck breast, plated around a duck confit, onion and spinach, finished with a lemon-fig glaze.

If you fancy shellfish, you might try the shrimp, scallops and clams prepared with spinach in a country ham-champagne cream sauce and placed over cappellini. Finally, among the palate-satisfying entree choices is a whole baby rack of lamb rubbed with herbs, pan seared, and served with crispy onions and chevre cheese over the vegetable of the day, perhaps asparagus or spinach, and sauced with a tequila-chipotle combination. When we have dinner at the Grocery Company, whether we select one of the menu items or one of the evening's special dishes, we inevitably marvel at the skill in preparation and the artistry in presentation of our chosen dishes.

For when you want to eat "light," the Grocery Company offers a few entree salads on the dinner menu, including a wonderful Caesar salad, a delicious Greek salad and "Aunt Marion's Apple and Onion Salad," consisting of field greens topped with apple, Bermuda onion, and gorgonzola cheese. These salads are nicely complemented by the "Harker's Island Fisherman's Soup"—shrimp, scallops, and locally caught fish simmered in a fish fume with julienne vegetables.

The Grocery Company has an extensive list of wines by the glass and by the bottle, drawn largely from Europe, South America and California. You will find wines that naturally complement any of

the entrees. A nice selection of beers and cocktails is also available.

Desserts at the Grocery Company are among the first things you will see in a display case when you enter the restaurant. They will appeal to your taste buds as much as your eyes. Most, perhaps all, of the desserts are locally made. Notable among the variety of cheesecakes is the peanut butter and chocolate combination. For virtue's sake, we usually share a piece. Wonderful too are the deep dish pecan pie and the apple pastry. If your appetizer and entree choices seem to preclude dessert, fear not, for you can take dessert home and perhaps eat it the next morning for breakfast. Take comfort in the fact that you won't be the first to do so.

The Beaufort Grocery Company is located at 117 Queen Street in Beaufort. The restaurant is open six days a week and closed on Tuesday. On Sunday, from 11:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m., the restaurant serves a wonderful brunch of eggs, scrambles, omelets and Benedicts that are prepared in inventive and mouthwatering ways. The brunch is a wonderful Sunday treat.

The Grocery Company may be reached at 728-3899. Reservations are possible, and they are especially advisable during the summer months. The restaurant's website is www.beaufort-grocery.com.

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