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Supporting Local Community Takes Many Forms at Poppy Hill Tuscan Kitchen

By Kate Beltz

Since opening for business in December of 2005, Poppy Hill Tuscan Kitchen (www.ciaopoppyhill.com) has established a loyal following with its authentic, made from scratch, northern Italian cuisine. But the restaurant also has drawn its loyal fan base from a growing number of residents who recognize and appreciate the restaurant's genuine community involvement.

Nestled in the heart of Fredericksburg, Virginia's beautiful historic district, the popular restaurant wows guests nightly by offering unique dishes featuring local organic ingredients complete with outstanding service and a constantly evolving, high-quality wine list – all at a reasonable price point.

The husband and wife team of Scott Mahar (Owner, Executive Chef) and Ingrid Mahar (Owner, General Manager and Wine Direc-

tor) brings an impressive culinary and service portfolio to the table at Poppy Hill. Scott earned his stripes working in numerous top-tier New York City and Washington, DC-area establishments, including Chanterelle, Galileo, the Ritz-Carlton, and Poste Modernne Brasserie. During her years with the Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company, Ingrid was nominated for numerous management awards, having graciously served high-profile guests ranging from George Clooney, The King of Jordan, and the Princess of Thailand, to the Rolling Stones and the Dixie Chicks.

The talented duo doesn't rest on their laurels, however, and play an increasingly active role in their community. Scott and Ingrid put a premium on actively participating in a wide variety of charity and outreach events in Virginia, including contributing toward the building of new shelters for the local Society

for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and donating food to the Fredericksburg Council on the Arts. They also continue their involvement in multiple fundraisers throughout the year for the Rappahanock Council on Domestic Abuse, for the Mary Washington Hospital Foundation, and for scholarships awarded to a wide variety of students in their community.

"Giving back to a community that has constantly shown us such warm support gives us a huge sense of purpose and accomplishment," Scott notes. "There is no better feeling than the satisfaction of knowing that you've made a difference, however modest."

In addition to supporting their community through charitable events, activities and donations, Scott and Ingrid turn to local Virginia farmers and growers as much as possible to source as many of the premium,

seasonal ingredients they use in their restaurant.

According to the Mahars, local sourcing pays off in a variety of ways. The practice supports their community of local producers, and the products they serve are chemical-free and all natural. Additionally, the food they serve to guests at Poppy Hill doesn't have to travel as far, tastes better, and doesn't require fuel and other resources necessary to transport it thousands of miles across the country.

Scott grew up enjoying dishes made by his Italian grandfather, who every Sunday would prepare for his family savory, hearty Italian meals using only fresh ingredients from his own gardens. These excellent meals of his childhood are the present inspiration



for Mahar's distinctive cooking style at Poppy Hill Tuscan Kitchen.

"I learned to cook at a very young age. Italians just have a passion for food and wine, and that lifestyle really made a lasting impression on me," Mahar notes. "The food in Tuscany, in particular, is so straightforward and simple. Dishes there don't have to have a dozen competing ingredients – it's just about joining together smart, ideal

combinations. We're convinced that this classic approach has broad appeal to a growing number of customers in the U.S. today."

To that end, all of the restaurant's pastas are made in-house from local ingredients, as are specialties like the menu's popular cannoli, which are filled "à la minute" so the shells remain crisp. Additional Poppy Hill dishes make use of fresh local mushrooms, Virginia greens, farm-fresh vegetables, and a variety of fruits from area orchards.

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Ingrid raises a great point to illustrate the Mahar mindset: "Why should we buy eggs from across the country when we can buy great quality eggs from someone just up the road from our restaurant? It may cost a bit more, but we know where the eggs came from, and what the farmers were feeding their chickens. The bottom line is that our guests at Poppy Hill won't be eating anything we wouldn't feed our own kids – and we manage to support our local Virginia economy to boot."

Kate Beltz lives and works in Portland, Maine, where she is enjoying the first signs of spring after a particularly long, snowy winter. She is an associate at Front Burner PR (www.frontburnerpr.com).