

glorious FOOD

By Glenda Burgeson

The topic of food and beverage is at once universal and personal. It is the stuff of myth and of art. That is why I was tempted to subtitle this set of stories “The Case of the Purloined Truffles.”

I was assigned to write about Johnnies who work in the food and beverage industry— a chef, cheese-maker, vintner, brewer, chocolatier and a couple of marketers. The assignment generated much interest, leading to impromptu conversations in the hallway of first floor Quad, and one mysterious office caper.

Aaron Barthel '98 kindly shipped editor Jean Scoon and me a sample box of chocolate truffles, the delivery of which caused such a stir we were forced to share. Office coordinator Julie Scegurá stored her portion in the office fridge, only to discover later that someone had allowed greed to overcome the normal Benedictine moderation that prevails around here and had swiped the morsels.

Food has that effect on people. It excites the senses and stirs the memories. John Taylor '58 assures me, with tongue in cheek, that Johnnies of his era share fond memories of sewer trout, a “delicacy” once served at the Reef on mandatory meatless Fridays. (I'll take his word for it.)

What struck me about this assignment was this: I interviewed Johnnies of all ages, from coast to coast, and they all described a similar experience. None had planned to work in the food and beverage industry. Instead, they each spoke of following a passion, of hard work and a commitment to excellence.

I realized I wasn't writing about the food and beverage industry after all. I was writing about a group of enterprising guys, a kindred spirit and a pursuit of a dream.

Glenda Burgeson is CSB/SJU director of editorial services—and a former barbecue chef and food critic.



How do you become an artisan and entrepreneur of fine food and drink? With passion, hard work and a commitment to excellence. Oh, and a degree in the liberal arts ...





From Omelets to Michelin Star

As a young child, Mark Sullivan '89 learned to make omelets under his mother's supervision. The achievement was an inspiration, the nationally renowned chef says.

From that modest start, Sullivan developed a lifelong interest in food that stayed with him when he left northern California for Saint John's as a varsity wrestler and avid outdoorsman. It continued to nag at him after he graduated with a degree in philosophy, and it has fueled a passion that has since helped build a national reputation and a culinary enterprise in the San Francisco area that encompasses pizzerias, a bakery, an organic farm, a coffee supply house and three restaurants, including one with a Michelin star.

That passion was, and is the key, Sullivan says. After graduation, he expected to attend graduate school, but decided to take a six-month break from school and indulge his love for cooking.

He ended up cooking under the tutelage of a talented chef, Amaryll Schwertner, who had cooked at the famed Chez Panisse in Berkeley. Competition was intense for the opportunity to work 60-80 hour weeks at a minimum wage with this chef. Sullivan did two things that made him stand out among his competitors. He wore a suit to the interview, while his rivals dressed in jeans and T-shirts. Also—and this is where he credits his degree—he wrote “a really nice letter after the interview.”

The letter made the difference. Schwertner told him she would take a chance on him, but he would have to deliver. For the



Frankie Frankeny

Mark Sullivan '89, chef-partner at the acclaimed Village Pub in Woodside, Calif., and Michelin-starred Spruce in San Francisco, is now establishing a third restaurant in Park City, Utah.

next six months, Sullivan worked harder than he could have imagined.

“It was hard. I got my chops busted,” he says. “For the first time in my life, I thought I was going to fail. Every day for 90 days, I went to work thinking I’m going to get fired.”

Instead, he persevered. After three months, he experienced a defining moment. Schwertner not only told him he was doing a great job, she brought him 50 cookbooks from her personal collection.

“It was one of those defining moments when I realized I can do this.”

A few months later, he had another defining moment. Sullivan was working long hours, coming in early to do preparation work and staying late to scrub the kitchen.

“One night I was cleaning the oven and noticed the clock said 12:30 a.m. I realized that I never looked at the clock. I had just worked 12 hours and time had just flown by. That’s when I went to my dad and told him I wanted to pursue this.”

While his dad had some concerns about the long hours and low pay, he agreed that Sullivan should pursue his passion. Sullivan secured an apprenticeship at a

“I realized that I never looked at the clock. I had just worked 12 hours and time had just flown by.”

—Mark Sullivan '89, chef and restaurateur

two-star restaurant in the south of France. From there he worked with a chef in the Pyrenees in Spain, then back to France, where he cooked for a family in Marseille in exchange for room and board.

After six months abroad, he returned to San Francisco and continued to train in the city's fine restaurants. He was poor, but in a good way. He recalls "splurging" twice a week for a cappuccino, and he lived in a closet, literally. He converted a walk-in closet at the home of a friend into his sleeping quarters. That arrangement suited him, because he was at work all the time.

In the mid 1990s, his reputation took off. Not yet 30, he was named chef at 42 Degrees, a Mediterranean restaurant. A rave review in the local press brought the foodies out in droves.

"The next day there was a line out the door," he recalls.

His fans have never left. He has received a favorable review in *Gourmet* magazine. In 2002 he was selected as one of America's best new chefs by *Food & Wine* magazine and *Esquire* listed his restaurant Spruce among its top new restaurants in 2008. Now chef-partner at the highly acclaimed Village Pub in Woodside, Calif., and Spruce in San Francisco, which has been awarded a Michelin star, Sullivan is establishing a third restaurant in a Waldorf Astoria hotel in Park City, Utah.

He is a partner in Bacchus Management Group, which owns the restaurants, along with a five-acre organic farm, a bakery, a coffee supply house and four pizzerias.



Becca Dilley Photography

Jeff Jirik '79, artisan cheesemaker and owner of the Faribault Dairy Co., uses a cutting harp to cut milk into curds in the cheese-making process. Faribault Dairy's Amablu® family of handmade blue cheeses has been winning prizes since 2002, including Grand Champion at the 2007 Minnesota State Fair.

Through it all he says his studies in philosophy help him keep grounded. He also found time to court and marry his pastry chef. Despite his work ethic, he makes it a priority to be home on weekends with Alison and two-year-old Ezra.

By the way, Sullivan's dad is a regular at the restaurant. "He gets whatever he wants," Sullivan says.

As for Ezra, he hasn't made any omelets; he prefers to fry his eggs, sunny-side up.

Planning ahead for that night out in San Francisco? Check the menu at sprucesf.com.

"Get a Job"... Making Premium Blue Cheese?

Jeff Jirik '79 didn't plan to become a cheese-maker. He stumbled into the business after graduation from SJU, when his father gave him the kind of directive only a father can give: "Get a job."

The job market then was weak. Jirik had moved back home when he heard that a cheese-making facility in Faribault, Minn., was hiring. He got a job scraping mold off the cheese. Within weeks, his supervisor found out he had a degree in biology and promoted him to laboratory technician. Thus began his foray into the cheese-making profession.





Aaron Barthel '98, chocolatier and owner of Seattle-based Intrigue Chocolates Co., with some of his handmade French truffles. His chocolate won several awards at the Seattle Luxury Chocolate Salon in both 2008 and 2009.

In the 1980s, the company promoted Jirik and, with his wife, Brenda (Sherwin) Jirik CSB '80, he relocated to Wisconsin. In 1991, the plant shut down. Jirik bought it in 2000 and established the Faribault Dairy Company. The company produces premium blue cheeses under the Amablu® label, including the award-winning St. Pete's Select, which is available in a version

that is soaked with Summit Beer. That is the brainchild of Jirik and CSB alumna Jeannie (Bykowski) Kenevan '98, market manager, Summit Brewing Co.

The cheeses are aged in St. Peter sandstone caves carved during the last glacial age from the river bluffs overlooking Faribault. Jirik says the atmosphere within the caves is ideally suited for curing and aging blue cheese.

Federal regulations prohibit public tours of the caves. However, Jirik has opened a cheese shop, The Cheese Cave, in downtown Faribault. There, visitors might spot yet another Johnnie connection. Jirik's former college roommate, Bob Foley '80, is the managing partner for The Cheese Cave. "We Johnnies do tend to stick together!" Jirik says.

You can't get into the caves, but you can get into the cheese at faribaultdairy.com.

Dairy + Botany = Truffles

Imagine a mad scientist loose in a chocolate factory. That would be chocolatier Aaron Barthel '98.

Ever since the creation of his signature French truffle, flavored with habanero chilies, nutmeg and dark rum, Barthel has been madly experimenting with flavor profiles for his mail-order truffle business, Intrigue Chocolates Co. To date, he has developed 68 flavors.

He also adds a secret ingredient to his confections that have swept the Seattle culinary scene: Minnesota spice. His award-winning sweets reflect a unique blend of his dairy farm childhood experiences in central Minnesota and his Benedictine education in ecology/botany at Saint John's.

From a young age, he learned from his parents an appreciation of natural flavors, seasonal produce and a connection with the source of food. As a natural science major at Saint John's, he continued to pursue a lifelong interest in plants.

His truffle flavors attest to the convergence of those interests: Lady Lavender, "like an evening walk through a French garden"; Good Thymes, with a "woody character"; Mucha Mocha, flavored with organic fair-trade coffee; and Mojito, a cocktail in the form of a truffle.

His truffle business began as a hobby, until friends persuaded him to supply them truffles for their catering business. Now a full-time chocolatier, he says he loves the creativity his job requires.

Barthel sees his business as a relationship-building enterprise. After all, chocolate is best enjoyed in the company of others. His business mantra is simply, "If this business isn't worthy of the passion, I'm done." So far, the passion thing is working for him.

Intrigued? Learn more at intriguechocolates.com.



Order from Chaos Yields Award-Winning Wines

After 25 years as an emergency room physician, Rich Evans '74 traded suturing for pruning.

"Both my wife and I said, 'Enough,'" Evans explains. Ten years ago he and his wife, Lynn Davis, downshifted from intense careers—she worked as a dean for special scholars at the University of Virginia—to the more seasonal, rhythmic vocation of viticulture as the owners of Flying Fox Vineyard.

The Le Sueur, Minn., native says they always knew they wanted to grow something.

"My father grew corn. It seemed like it would be a little more fun to grow grapes," he says.

The project was a labor of love, tending three varieties—merlot, cabernet franc and petit verdot—on six and a half acres, against a breathtaking backdrop of Blue Ridge Mountains in Afton, Va., near Charlottesville.

"We have grown grapes for 10 years and have lost money every year on them," he recalls.

Four years ago, the couple took the next step—making wine. They are beginning to see the rewards of that effort. Their 2006 Petit Verdot won a gold medal at the 2009 Virginia Governor's Cup wine competition. Their 2006 Trio and 2006 Cabernet Franc received bronze medals.

With 5,000 vines, the vineyard produces 38 tons of grapes and approximately 25,000 bottles of wine annually. Each year is an adventure, he says, and each venture—growing the grapes, making the wine and selling it—is a separate enterprise, with a separate learning curve. Tending the vineyard is his favorite.

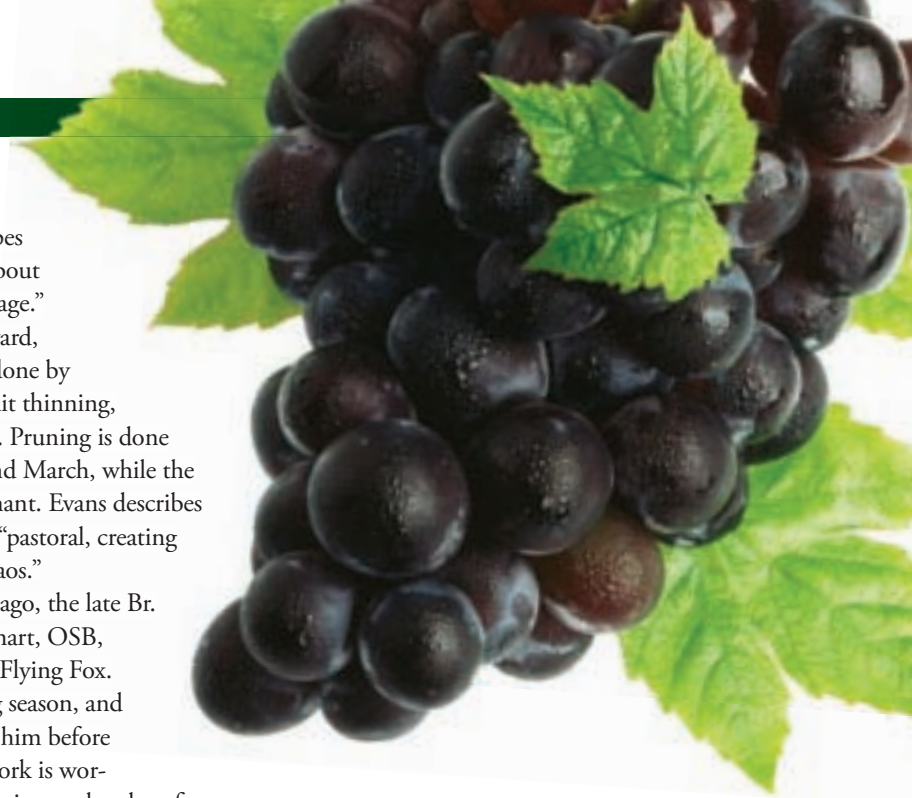
"We just love growing grapes. It's

delightful to watch the grapes and wonder about this year's vintage."

In the vineyard, everything is done by hand—the fruit thinning, the harvesting. Pruning is done in February and March, while the vines are dormant. Evans describes the process as "pastoral, creating order from chaos."

A few years ago, the late Br. Dietrich Reinhart, OSB, spent a day at Flying Fox. It was pruning season, and Evans warned him before the visit, "If work is worship, you are going to do a lot of worshipping."

Br. Dietrich spent the day in worship, prune shears in hand.



You don't have to go to Virginia to try Evans's fine wines. Learn more at flyingfoxvineyard.com.



After 25 years as a doctor, Rich Evans '74 became a vintner and is now co-owner with his wife of Flying Fox Vineyards in Virginia, producing 25,000 bottles of wine annually. Their 2006 Petit Verdot won a gold medal at the 2009 Virginia Governor's Cup wine competition.



Let's Brew

Wouldn't it be great to start a brewery? Dan Schwarz '97 and some of his neighbors thought so. Four years after an idle conversation, Schwarz is a partner and CEO in Lift Bridge Brewery in Stillwater, Minn.

The idea began as backyard chatter among five neighbors, Schwarz says.

"We were talking about how we would like to have a brewery, and we decided to get together and brew," he says.

They began with recipe development; next came recipe refinement. Then there were the business and licensing details. They produced the company's first keg in 2008.

Now Schwarz has two careers. He kept his day job in computer science to pay the bills. It helps that he works at home, he says. When he takes a break, he can spend time with his children—Alex, 10; Jacob, 8; and Matthew, 5—and his wife, Katie (Macy) Schwarz, a '97 CSB alumna and hall of fame diver at CSB.

Bread, Brats and Beer

In Louisiana Cajun country, the aromatic vegetables bell pepper, onion and celery are affectionately called the holy trinity. In Collegeville, the same may be said of bread, brats and beer.

Enter John Uldrich '60, food marketer extraordinaire. He views Johnnie Bread as an important branding element, one that fuses the power of symbolism with the power of memory.

Add beer and bratwurst sausages, and you have all the major food groups for a fine

As CEO, Schwarz will have greater interaction with other businesses as the company builds its distribution. That's the easy part.

"Selling beer is the easiest job in the world," Schwarz says. He walks into an establishment, offers the manager a sample and lets the beer sell itself.

For Schwarz and his partners, it is important to associate their beer with a place. Thus, they named their brewery for a distinctive landmark in Stillwater. The name helps establish their company within the community, and lends itself to visual marketing opportunities.

The brewery had one other marketing advantage. Schwarz's brother, Steve, is a CSB/SJU adjunct assistant professor in management and an adviser to the marketing club. The club prepared a full marketing plan for the company.

For more on brews by Schwarz and his neighbors, go to liftbridgebrewery.com



Becca Dilley Photography

Dan Schwarz '97 is partner and CEO of Stillwater, Minn.-based Lift Bridge Brewery, which takes its name from a distinctive Stillwater landmark. The company produced its first keg in 2008. Schwarz is now focusing on building the brewery's distribution network.

Collegeville meal.

Twenty years ago, Uldrich introduced wild rice sausage at a food show. Johnnie Brats are his latest creation. He has trademarked the product on behalf of Saint John's. The brats are sold locally at St. Joe's Meat Market, with a portion of the profits designated for Saint John's.

"Brats date back to the 1500s," says Uldrich, who has worked in the food industry for more than half a century, including summers as a teenager at his grandfather's award-winning creamery, Pine Mountain

Creamery, in northern Minnesota. He flavors the Johnnie Brats with foods associated with Saint John's—apple, wild rice, maple syrup and beer.

Olde Johnnie Ale has a similar marketing arrangement, with a portion of its proceeds benefitting Saint John's Preparatory School. The ale is brewed at the Gluek Brewery in Cold Spring and is available at several locations throughout Central Minnesota, including Brother Willie's Pub at SJU.

Steve Zimmerman '72 joined a group of SJ Prep alumni, including Lee Jordan '72 and

Mark Selner (Prep '68), who conceived the Olde Johnnie Ale idea while sharing a pint.

The guys poured their hearts into the project, as Zimmerman reports that the ale required "many taste tests to arrive at a formula."

Their hard work was rewarded. "It turned out quite good," he says.

The ale was officially tapped at Brother Willie's Pub during a sesquicentennial celebration, Family Fun Day, sponsored by Saint John's Abbey, Liturgical Press, Preparatory School and University.