



Karen Masterson, owner of nourish in Lexington Center

RIBS & tofu?

*Written by Elena Murphy
Photographed by Laurie Atwater*



nourish is at 1727 Massachusetts Avenue, Lexington Center, at the location where Not Your Average Joe's used to be. It's open Monday – Thursday, 11 am – 9 pm; Friday 11 am – 10 pm; Saturday 10 am – 10 pm and Sunday 10 am – 9 pm. Brunch available Saturday and Sunday 10 am – 1 pm. (781) 674-2400. www.nourishlexington.com

If you want to dig into a plate of ribs and have a beer, nourish restaurant in Lexington Center is your spot. If you want to savor tempeh over brown rice, nourish does that, too. It's an unusual hybrid on the Lexington restaurant scene.

With local art brightening the walls, nourish is the latest brainchild of owner Karen Masterson. A blend of two very different restaurants that Karen and her husband Kevin have created, this restaurant is a place where even the most diverse tastes can get a satisfying meal.

And this restaurant has an unusual pedigree. Karen's husband Kevin Masterson developed Tennessee's BBQ in the early 1990s, when Southern barbecue was just a blip on the restaurant screen in Massachusetts. It has expanded greatly, and some of its customers' favorites such as the dry-rub barbecued ribs and chicken wings appear on nourish's menu. About six years ago, right down the street from Tennessee's, Karen started Big Fresh Cafe, a "fast-casual" restaurant with a healthy twist. The wraps, rice paper rolls, salmon and tofu that were so popular at Big Fresh are also available at nourish.

The idea for this new restaurant all started when Masterson noticed an inter-

To celebrate good local food, especially during these long winter months, nourish is hosting a dinner of all regional ingredients, known as the ALLocal Dinner. It is being sponsored in part by the Sustainable Business Network's Boston Chapter and will happen Tuesday, January 12th at 6:30 PM. Interested in seats to the ALLocal dinner? Registration information is at www.sbnboston.org/sbn15/local-food/alllocal-dinners

esting trend while working at Big Fresh. Night after night she'd see people pull up in a car and a few people in the family or group would get take-out at Big Fresh and others would go directly to Tennessee's.

She started thinking about how diverse people are when it comes to what they eat. She also started thinking about how people have "a lot of good conversations around a table," and she wanted to design a place "where everyone feels they've been heard." Masterson envisioned a restaurant where a group of people could eat together whether they

nourish Lexington's newest restaurant offers something for everyone.

wanted a healthy burger, vegetarian wrap, or "stick-to-your-ribs" barbecue. Then, once everyone could find what they want to eat, she thought, those interesting conversations could get underway.

With barbecue and rice paper rolls equally represented on the menu at nourish, which opened in late July, the biggest challenge seems to be getting the word out about the wide-ranging menu. Whether it's the name, which sounds slightly New Age-y, or a dated perception of healthy food as bland, there is a view that this restaurant may not be for folks who want all-out indulgence. However, Masterson says she chose the name specifically because we are "all nourished by different things" whether it is that plate of ribs and beer, or tofu with homemade peanut sauce.

And the Mastersons have a knack for recognizing what people really want to eat. She and her husband were just moving back to the United States in the early 1990s, after he had wrapped up work managing a chain of restaurants in Canada, when her husband and Lexington resident David Bara decided to start a restaurant specializing in barbecue. They chose to bring Tennessee's, which was then a small restaurant in Boston's Lenox hotel, to Framingham, and eventually grew it into the prospering chain that it is today, with locations throughout Massachusetts and now in Pennsylvania. Several years later, Karen opened Big Fresh Café, which she just sold this fall.

And whether they've been to the other restaurants or not, people are responding to nourish's eclectic menu. Masterson recounts how recently a big party of bikers came in at the recommen-

Nourish, continued on page 39



ribs



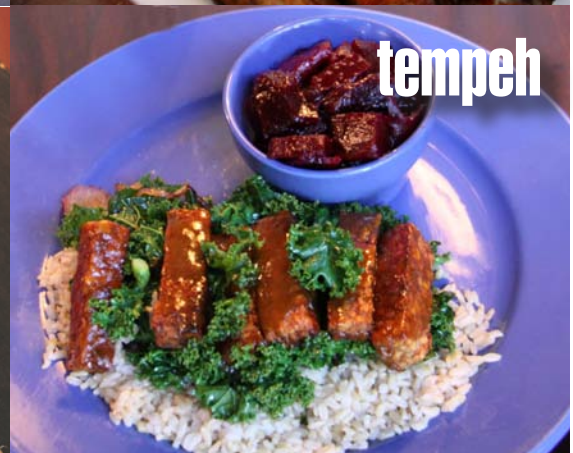
big baby salad



wings



sour dough pizza



tempeh

From top to bottom:

Farmland Memphis Ribs; smoked pork ribs are prepared with a dry rub and served with BBQ beans, cucumber salad cornbread and sweet and sassy Tennessee BBQ sauce.

Big Baby Salad is a favorite with organic greens, sliced pears, walnuts and Great Hill Blue Cheese.

BBQ Chicken Wings are dry rubbed and slow smoked and basted with your choice of Frank's Hot Sauce or Tennessee's BBQ sauce.

Sourdough Vegetarian Pizza is prepared with roasted garlic, red bell peppers and zucchini.

Tempeh from 21st Century foods in Jamaica Plains is served with a delicious maple molasses sauce.

Nourish, continued from page 25



Four Seasons Hotel. So, when she was ready to start her new venture in Lexington, she designed the menu and restaurant to appeal anyone who'd be walking in.

Part of the appeal, Masterson says, is that she's taking advantage of fresh, local sources.

dation of one who had enjoyed the chicken wings so much she wanted all her friends to try them. That same day, Masterson had a conversation with a raw food advocate who asked Masterson to include a juice bar at the restaurant.

So, how did this menu emerge? Masterson says it "reflected how we eat" at home. She says that giving her family the best food she has always been a priority. She says she's raised "salad on a balcony" before she had kids, and has "been canning forever." Because she says quality is so important, nourish offers several homemade sauces, which Masterson says, usually aren't available at mid-priced restaurants like hers.

Masterson has always enjoyed cooking, whether it's making homemade soup to be ready for after the kids' soccer games or preparing a special dessert. In fact, when her son was in junior high, an "awkward time" for communication, she says, she and her son agreed that he'd help make one of his favorite treats, lemon meringue pie, and the next day he'd get the last piece. On the day he was to get that coveted last slice, Karen asked him if he'd been thinking about that last piece since he'd got on the bus to go home, and he said, more like since the bus ride to school.

It's no surprise, then, that the rise of this family's growing business really is a family affair. When Big Fresh opened, the Mastersons' then teenage son washed dishes and prepped food at the restaurant while their daughter did prep work, too, and worked the register. Karen says it's great that the kids can see "what their parents do." She describes how her husband "jumps in and does the dishes at any of the restaurants; he's not too important" to do any job that helps the business run smoothly. And the youngest daughter now helps with nourish's catering events.

Masterson knows her way around the restaurant business and that was a decided advantage when taking nourish from concept to reality. Like her kids, she started by washing dishes for her brother-in-law's restaurant, later working as a catering manager for the

She has used produce from Busa Farm and Blue Heron Farm in Lincoln. She also uses Number 9 salsa by Paino Organics, owned by Concord resident John Paino, who also developed Nasoya tofu. And the burgers are made with ground beef from River Rock Farm in Brimfield, Mass.

She recognizes that being part of the community means getting people and food together. To celebrate good local food, especially during these long winter months, nourish is hosting a dinner of all regional ingredients, known as the ALLocal Dinner. It is being sponsored in part by the Sustainable Business Network's Boston Chapter, of which Masterson has been a board member over the years. The dinner will be held January 12, 2010, and is an opportunity for people throughout the community to meet each other and enjoy a great meal made from all local sources.

Masterson has given food and social justice a lot of thought since her days of being at home with young kids, and volunteering for non-profits, including organizing a benefit for Share Our Strength, which aims to eliminate childhood hunger. To address the problem of hunger, nourish recently participated in the second annual "Soup Bowls for Hunger." People who bought soup received pottery bowls made by artists in the Lexington Arts and Crafts Society Ceramics Guild, and Masterson donated a portion of each sale to the Lexington Interfaith Food Pantry.

Continuing to build her restaurant's connection with local artists, Masterson has offered the glass-covered case on nourish's patio to the Lexington Arts and Crafts Society as well. And, in January the restaurant will have a juried art show. Jurists will include artists Emily Passman, Barbara Lucas, and gallery owner Francesca Anderson.

As Masterson sees it, whether someone comes in for one of these special events or to just to satisfy a special craving, the right food at nourish makes good conversations around a table possible.