

Interview/The Chefs' Forum

A culinary hub of excellence

MARK TAYLOR meets some of the key players in the newly formed Chefs' Forum, which aims to inspire young catering students, as well as forge links between chefs, colleges and local businesses



If anybody was worried about where the next generation of Bristol chefs was coming from, the answer might just be in the kitchens of Berwick Lodge hotel in Henbury.

Jamie Cahill is a catering student at the City of Bristol College but his work placement apprenticeship at Berwick Lodge means that he is benefiting from hands-on experience in a busy restaurant kitchen and getting additional training from professional chefs.

Jamie is a VRQ level 3 student at the college, where his trainer is Adrian Kirikmaa. At Berwick Lodge, he is working under head chef Ed Tatton and executive chef Chris Wicks, who also owns Bell's Diner in Montpelier.

Both Kirikmaa and Wicks are committee members of the newly launched Chefs' Forum, a networking group for Bristol chefs.

The Chefs' Forum was set up to help chefs with everything from recruitment to equipment.

It is a sort of "one stop shop" to help busy chefs find staff, the right piece of kitchen kit and even help them to source the best local ingredients.

To give it even more kudos, the Forum is made up of chefs whose professional expertise has been recognised by prestigious guides such as Michelin and the Which? Good Food Guide.

Those involved so far include a number of the city's most respected chefs, including Ron Faulkner of The Muset by Ronnie, Matthew Williamson of Flinty Red and Josh Eggleton of the Michelin-starred Pony & Trap in Chew Magna.

As well as there being a social element to the networking group, there is also a serious educational side, as it gives chefs the chance to join forces with local catering colleges.

Organiser Catherine Farinha says one of the main aims of The Chefs' Forum is to inspire and coach young catering students, as well as forge links between chefs, colleges and local businesses.

She says: "Having worked in the food marketing industry for the last ten years, I identified the need for a communication channel between trade, industry and education.

"Similar initiatives have been attempted before but they haven't stood the test of time, as the commercial or trade element has not been present.

"Trade organisations had previously wanted to get involved with the work I was doing with restaurants and chefs but I had no way of enabling them to do so.

"It was this fact that inspired me to start the Bristol Chefs' Forum with Adrian Kirikmaa at City of Bristol Col-



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lege with a new set of objectives.

"The Chefs' Forum is now about pooling together collective industry contacts and allowing all three elements (industry, education and trade) to benefit from them.

"This means that when the college needs a baker to demonstrate patisserie, for example, they have access to them, and when a restaurant needs an apprentice, they can get one.

"We want to make it easy for every top restaurant in Bristol to have access to apprentices and a great working relationship with the colleges."

As well as City of Bristol College, local catering education providers involved with The Chefs' Forum include West-

super-Mare College and St Katherine's VI Form in Pill.

Catering college students who demonstrate great promise and dedication will be invited to join round-table meetings with the city's best

chefs, enabling students to gain a valuable insight of the industry before entering into it.

The Forum also provides a facility for the city's top chefs to share their knowledge and experience through exchanging time in each others' kitchens.

Chiefs will spend time in each other's places of work and enjoy guest speeches from experts on specialist subjects like organics, chocolate or food and wine pairing.

Quality local producers and

Left, from left: Organiser Catherine Farinha with chefs from left, Adrian Kirikmaa, Chris Wicks and Josh Eggleton at Berwick Lodge Hotel. Far left: The Berwick Lodge team

suppliers will also be invited to showcase their wares at Forum events, all of which helps to support the use of their products in Bristol restaurants and therefore boost the local economy.

The Chefs' Forum has already attracted sponsorship from a number of high profile local businesses including Total Produce, Brian Wogan Coffee, David Lloyd, The Clifton Range, Bristol Audi, Robert Welch and Bristol Buffalo Farm Shop.

Farinha says: "The mission is to tell the world about the abundance of fantastic chef talent coming out of Bristol and the surrounding area and to help position it as a culinary hub of excellence in the UK.

"Chefs will be kept informed on what's going on in the colleges including details of any competitions and events in which students are involved. They will also be able to source apprentices and work experience candidates through the scheme.

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Adrian Kirikmaa says: "We are in the throws of a recession where morale is at an all-time low.

"It is important that our students know that there is a job at the end of their studies and that their hard work and dedication will pay off.

"I am delighted with the positive reaction of the chefs and their willingness to get involved in The Chefs' Forum."

Chris Wicks says: "The Chefs' Forum offers the chance to network with some of the South West's best chefs.

"It is great to be able to communicate and share knowledge with such a talented group who all speak the same language.

"I am especially excited about enthusing the next generation of young chefs through working with the schools and colleges."

For more information visit www.thechefsforum.co.uk.

Food/Review

Strawberry Line Cafe

Yatton Railway Station Station Approach, Yatton, BS49 4FF. Tel 01934 835758

Prices: Sandwiches from £1.95; soup from £2.45; pasta dishes from £3.25; Desserts and cakes from £1.25

Wheelchair access: Yes (and toilets are on the platform)

Food/7

Service/7

Value/8

Overall/7

I had precisely 41 minutes to enjoy my lunch at the Strawberry Line Cafe on the platform at Yatton railway station.

Actually, that's one minute more than I expected because the 12.23 was running late and that gave me an extra 60 seconds to walk across the footbridge from the cafe to the platform where the next train would take me back to Bristol Temple Meads.

Designed by Brunel, Yatton railway station was opened in 1841 and was a vital part of the link to Clevedon until Mr Beeching closed the branch line in 1966.

These days, Yatton station is simply another stop between Bristol and Weston-super-Mare, but it used to be a lot more than that.

Until the early Sixties, the branch line from Yatton transported the world-famous strawberries from Cheddar and Axbridge, hence its quaint nickname of the Strawberry Line.

Yatton station is an architectural gem, to be ranked alongside timeless stations such as Kemble in the Cotswolds.

Just over a year ago, a group of locals got together to breath new life into the station and re-open the cafe on the platform.

This not-for-profit community cafe now provides opportunities for adults with learning disabilities and they make up more than a quarter of the workforce.

Although some are full-time employees, there are also a number of volunteers who would like paid work but who have found it difficult to get because of their learning disabilities or a skills gap.

Working at the Strawberry Line Cafe gives them invaluable experience and it's not surprising



so many people are queuing up to work there.

The staff who served me were charming and couldn't have been more accommodating. On a bitterly cold day, the welcome couldn't have been warmer.

A two-room cafe with an open kitchen behind the counter, there are pale pink clapboard walls, squishy purple sofas and Art Deco sidelights. There's a bookcase of well-thumbed books for those who want something to read between journeys and a wood burner belting out the heat.

As a reminder of the building's location, an old GWR Somerset poster occupies one wall, a framed photo of Trevor Howard and Celia Johnson in Brief Encounter on another.

The extensive menu offers sandwiches, paninis, cooked breakfasts and a full specials menu, all to eat in or take away.

Specials on the day I visited included butternut squash soup with sourdough (£3.45) and Parma ham salad with sourdough (£4.95). Also from the chalkboard was

my Stilton, leek and potato tart (£4.95) which arrived as a generous slice, piping hot and boasting plenty of tangy cheese. It was served with decent-sized portions of three salads - well-dressed cherry tomatoes, a scoop of potato salad and a creamy coleslaw.

Everything at the Strawberry Line Cafe is cooked to order on the premises - unusual for a railway cafe these days - and there is a policy of using as many local suppliers as possible.

There wasn't time to order the homemade bread and butter pudding or the baked cheesecake from the specials board, so I bought a slice of rich and fudgy chocolate and cherry brownie (£1.25) for the onward journey.

With the 12.23 to Bristol due any minute, it was time to make tracks from the Strawberry Line Cafe after what had been the most pleasant, if briefest of encounters, but this is one railway cafe well worth breaking the journey for.

MT

Food/Pub of the week

Jersey Lily

193 Whiteladies Road Clifton, Bristol, BS8 2SB. Tel 0117 946 7408

Like most pubs trying to ride the choppy waves of recession, the Jersey Lily has changed hands countless times in recent years. I have lost count of the occasions when I have walked past to see a "lease this pub" sign above the door.

Hopefully new manager Mike Baker will be hanging around a bit longer than his many predecessors. Baker has returned to the pub business after taking time out of this increasingly tough industry and his previous pubs include The Plough at Filton.

Named after the colourful Jersey-born Victorian actress Lily Langtry, this Whiteladies Road pub has always been a popular watering hole for locals and shoppers alike.

Mike has smartened up the place and the leather sofas, church candles, spiky spot plants and horizontal blinds on the windows give it a relaxed wine bar feel.



Although traditional in style, the chocolate brown tongue-and-groove panels are decorated with contemporary photos of pop icons including Kurt Cobain, Amy Winehouse and Liam Gallagher.

A traditional pub food menu featuring the likes of 10oz gammon steak with fried egg or pineapple, chips and peas (£7.95) and homemade beefburger with salad and chips (£8.95) is complemented by a range of tapas

dishes (£3.95 each or three for £10) that takes in chicken wings in barbecue sauce, spicy meat balls and crab cakes. There are also three platters (£5.95) on offer - a Continental meat board, a cheese board or a fish board.

When I visited, there was also a chalkboard of daily specials including 16oz T-bone with chips and salad (£12.95) and sausage and mash with onion gravy (£5.95).

The Sunday lunches are also proving popular and there are four choices (beef, pork, lamb or a vegetarian option). One course is £9.95 but you can order two courses for £11.95 or three for £13.95.

Real ale fans can choose between Courage Directors, Butcombe Bitter and St Austell Tribute, and there is a range of premium lagers and ciders.

MT

Food/What's on

Thursday, February 16

Vegetarian cookery course

Papadeli, 84 Alma Road, Clifton

Papadeli head chef Stefani Smith demonstrates European vegetarian cookery with a focus on healthy dishes using sustainable ingredients.

This masterclass in creative seasonal cooking will show you how to come up with delicious and easy meals suitable for both a Monday night supper or Saturday

dinner party. Places cost £65 per person. Call 0117 973 6569.

Friday, February 17

Food market

Wine Street, Bristol

This weekly market includes a number of familiar market favourites such as Pippins doughnuts, Pullins Bakers, Crumpet Cakes and Greens of Glastonbury, as well as street food from Niangs Thai Snacks, Chef De Maison and

Dr Weng Chillli Daddy.

The market runs from 10am to 4pm.

Saturday, February 18

Farmers' market

Whiteladies Road

This twice-monthly farmers' market brings together a number of top quality local producers and artisans.

Bread, fruit and vegetables, meat, cheese, cakes and organic flowers and plants are just a few of



the attractions.

The market takes place on the corner of Whiteladies Road and Apsley Road from 8.30am to 2pm.

Love Farm Festival

St Werburghs City Farm, pictured

This free community event celebrates the farm's new play area with an afternoon of music, food, drinks and entertainment for kids.

Other activities include circus skills, story telling, puppet theatre, clay sculpting, herb planting, craft and food market stalls, mulled wine, hot cider, plus question and

answer sessions from local herbalists, bee-keepers and more. 1pm to 5pm. Free entry.

Sunday, February 19

Tobacco Factory Sunday Market

Raleigh Road, Southville

The weekly community market in the car park behind the Tobacco Factory in Southville features around 30 food and craft stalls with a strong bias towards ethical, eco-friendly, Fairtrade, organic and

local products. The market runs from 10am-2.30pm.

Monday, February 20

Spanish wine tasting

Papadeli, 84 Alma Road, Clifton

A tasting of the full-bodied, dry red wines from award-winning Spanish estate Emilio Moro Ribera del Duero, with matching cheese and charcuterie from Papadeli's extensive range. 7.30pm, £20 per person. Call 0117 973 6569.