

# Out and About in Delco Chef's Table offers unique culinary experience

Back in the fall on one of those warm October days, a friend took me to lunch at Broad



**Peg Degrassa**  
 Managing Editor

Table Tavern at the Inn at Swarthmore. We dined al fresco right on the Swarthmore College campus, sitting on the outside patio surrounded by autumn's colored splendor, while the men's soccer team prac-

ticed in our view. It was a leisurely, welcoming place, with exceptional ambience, and our lunch was delicious. I found out that day that the menus are seasonally inspired, showcasing locally sourced ingredients and regional, artisan products. The food is best classified as contemporary American. Conveniently located on South Chester Road, right in the heart of downtown Swarthmore, the restaurant is classy and has a unique style and atmosphere all of its own, in what I would sum up as "academic-hip." When I left, I vowed to go back soon, but then life got in the way and winter passed.

Last week, I got an unexpected spring-time thrill when I was invited as a guest to the Chef's Table event at Broad Table Tavern. Once a month, Broad Table Tavern's Chef Keith Ahern is joined by a visiting chef. Together, they prepare a gourmet five-course meal — better described as a dining experience— with each course paired with

specialty beverages.

Since they graciously told me that I could bring a dining guest, I arrived with my son around 6:30 p.m. for pre-dinner cocktails. The bar at Broad Table Tavern was packed with most eyes glued to the NFL Draft in Philadelphia, airing on TV. The Inn at Swarthmore holds the only liquor license in town, although on May 16, voters in Swarthmore will get to decide whether to pass or deny a referendum that would grant liquor licenses to two other establishments.

The dining room looked full, which says a lot for the place since it was a weeknight. Dinner would be served to us and 11 other guests in the Ingleneuk Room, a private room off of the bar area. Chef Liam Kelleher, of North Shore, Mass., was the visiting chef who designed and prepared our five-course meal.

As we settled in and waited for Chef Ahern and Chef Kelleher to come out to talk about the first course, the 12 other diners and I introduced ourselves. I was instantly reminded of the 1960-'70s dinner parties where people from a variety of backgrounds were seated at the same table to meet while breaking

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bread together for the first time. My parents used to have dinner parties like that and they'd carefully choose an eclectic group of mixed guests to make the dinner party interesting and the conversation stimulating and memorable. I haven't heard of a home dinner party in a lot of years. Times have changed, but not so much that we still don't enjoy a dinner party — only these days, those dinner parties have moved to neighborhood restaurants (who has time to whip up those frozen parfaits and roast a prime rib like my mother did in the '70s?).

It was fun to be seated with people I never met before. Many at our ta-

ble were repeat customers, having attended a Chef's Table event before, and a few others were first-timers, newbies like my son and me. Mostly everyone there was a "foodie," and they exchanged information about local foods and dining experiences.

During the evening, the repeat diners told us about past Chef's Table events with different themes. During the course of the evening, they also repeatedly praised Chef Ahern, for whom they seemed to have great respect and admiration. Swarthmore residents Jeff and Kathy Gemberling are regulars. Kathy said her favorite was a recent southern-themed cuisine event, while Jeff said he really enjoyed the local farm-to-table event.

Swarthmore residents Greg Brown and Linton Stables are also regulars. They both told us that their hands-down favorite so far was the seafood-themed Chef's Table event.

Dinner began promptly at 7 p.m., with the first course being a peeky-toe crab stuffed with focaccia, herbs, aioli, poppy seed and spring allium, paired with J. Moreau & Fils Chablis, 2015. I had never heard of this crab, but Chef Liam came out and told us all about these Maine rock or sand crabs, which were pretty much a throwaway byproduct of lobster fishing before 1997. Nowadays, this crab is highly sought by the most discriminating chefs around the world. Only rock crabs from Penobscot Bay in Downeast Maine were called peekytoes until demand increased; now they are sourced from Rhode Island to Nova Scotia.

Chef Liam said that his New England menu for last week's Chef's Ta-



ble event was influenced by his previous two chef employments in Virginia and South Carolina. In fact, Chef Liam and Chef Keith met in South Carolina when they worked together. The New England-with-a-twist menu focused on simplicity, rather than loading a plate so high that the distinct and exotic flavors get lost.

The courses that followed included course two, Spring in the Garden (peas, spring vegetables, parsnip, crème fraiche, twice-cooked egg, paired with Bodegas Ethero, Rias Bixas albarino, 2015; course three, tortelloni en brodo, veal, shitake, asparagus, spruce, olive oil, black pepper, paired with Domaine Manuel Olivier, Bourgogne Pinot Noir, 2014; course four, grilled lamb, carrot harissa, fava beans, confit potato, ramps, paired with Graffigna Centenario Reserve Malbec, 2014; course five, lemon budino, pea mousse, mint, almond shortbread, paired with Les Mingets Santernes, 2013.

Admittedly, the pea mousse was a little shocking for dessert, because you could definitely taste the peas, but even that was a yummy combo. My fellow diner Linton said he very rarely likes dessert, but this was a good one, especially paired with the choice of wine.

Both the visiting and resident chef came out prior to each course to explain the ingredients, inspiration, cooking method

and source of the dish. Why does everything taste better after knowing the mushrooms were gathered from a forest in Maine and the crab was sitting on tiny slivers of rock salt and not rice as all the diners first thought? It seemed like every ingredient had a story and we all learned a lot from the chefs and from added information offered by our fellow diners.

In fact, while I was dining, I couldn't help but think of the lost "art" of small talk. I'm not sure many younger people, thanks to cellphones, have this necessary skill. Face-to-face dining is a social elixir, forcing everyone there, of all ages, to mingle and offer their thoughts during the dinner conversation. It was kind of fun and interesting to see the small talk that happened among the 13 dinner guests. The conversation went from service dogs to Swarthmore College events to one couple's lifelong dream of opening up a little café restaurant in Philly to what the Swarthmore residents at the table enjoyed most about living in the walkable, friendly borough.

For those who find the small talk aspect way too much work or dining with strangers way too uncomfortable, they can certainly gather a dozen friends or family members and make their reservations early so the Chef's Table can be

their own table of desired guests. I, personally, think the surprise guest list was half the fun, but to each his own.

When I finished my coffee and dessert, I almost felt sad that our event was drawing to a close because it was such an enjoyable, different kind of experience. It would be a unique, memorable event to take someone to celebrate a special occasion, like a birthday or anniversary, or to go with an out-of-town visiting guest or business associate. Heck, it is fun for anyone wanting to spruce up their month with something special and fun.

The general consensus around the table (The Chef's Table, that is!) was a giant thumb's up for Chefs Kelleher and Ahern. In the words of Kathy, our fellow diner, "The meal was very innovative and the flavor and quality of food was superb!"

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*The Chef's Table events are held at The Broad Table Tavern on the last Thursday of every month. Since seating is limited, diners must call in advance for reservations at (610) 543-7500. Cost is \$95, which includes all food and beverages, but not gratuity. To preview the menu, check out the visiting chef or find out more details, visit [theinnatswat.com](http://theinnatswat.com). The Inn at Swarthmore is located at 10 S. Chester Road, Swarthmore, PA 19081.*



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Visiting Chef Liam Kelleher, of New England, left, joined Broad Table Tavern's Chef Keith Ahern in preparing the culinary delights presented at the restaurant's Chef's Table Event in April. Each month, Broad Table Tavern in Swarthmore presents a feast prepared by a visiting chef that includes beverage pairings and an interesting mix of interesting dinner guests.



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The fourth course of the Chef's Table event was grilled lamb with carrot harissa, fava beans, confit potato and ramps. The entrée was paired with Graffigna Centenario Reserve Malbec, 2014.