

True North

Drawn by its pristine lakes, wild scenery and laid-back lifestyle, a wave of entrepreneurs have transformed the food scene in this neck of Minnesota, with delicious results

By Betsy Andrews

LOCATION PHOTOGRAPHY BY SARA RUBINSTEIN

FOOD PHOTOGRAPHY BY RYAN LIEBE

The northern Minnesota night was still. The sky sparkled with stars, loons called to each other across Poplar Lake. But inside the Poplar Haus restaurant last summer, it was hopping. Vacationers and hardy locals sipped Northwoods Mules spiked with local aquavit. One of the owners, Bryan Gerrard, was shuttling around the dining room. "It's been so busy!" he said. "There's this magnetism drawing younger people up here."

Gerrard should know. Three years ago, he and his wife, Stacey, along with chef Kippy Kuboy and his partner,

Lynse McDonough, were burnt out on the Minneapolis dining scene. They were lured to this part of Minnesota, a region that stretches along Lake Superior from Duluth to Ontario, for its laid-back vibe. The couples overhauled a decrepit resort and created hip Poplar Haus, where the cozy cabins and Kuboy's inventive comfort food reeled in crowds.

Kuboy emerged from the kitchen with a walleye po'boy. "I don't see myself going back to the city. I'm an avid outdoors guy," he said, summing up the appeal of the area. Millions of visitors come every year to explore the 1,100

tree-fringed lakes of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area, see the northern lights in Voyageurs National Park, ramble along the Superior Hiking Trail and explore the harbor towns along the 110-mile drive from Duluth to Grand Marais.

"I really like the new energy and vision," chef and retired restaurateur Judi Barsness said. "When we came here 30 years ago, we were the ones with that vision." She was prepping for a day of teaching at North House Folk School, which her husband helped launch in 1997, in Grand Marais. Barsness' class, dubbed "Cooking with the Seasons," is just one of hundreds that teach the



Chef Kippy Kuboy fishes for lots of different species on the lakes of northeastern Minnesota, but his favorite to hook are splake. The hybrid of brook and lake trout has richly colored orange meat that he likes to blacken with the Japanese spice blend togarashi.



crafts and skills of living Up North. You can even learn to build a skiff like those that 19th-century Scandinavian settlers once used to catch fish in Lake Superior.

Heading south to Duluth along Highway 61 (yes, *that* Highway 61, Bob Dylan fans) there are plenty of opportunities to chase waterfalls (Gooseberry Falls State Park alone has five), ramble through the woods, check out light-houses and skip rocks on calm inlets of the lake. And when you're hungry, you could heed the siren call of a berry-filled slice from a pie shop or grab some smoked whitefish and trout from one of the smokehouses along the way.

Not that Duluth doesn't offer its own delicious discoveries. Back in the early 1900s, Duluth boasted the nation's busiest port, shipping ore from Minnesota's Iron Range to America's steel plants. The town thrived—until the 1970s when the high-grade iron ore ran out and the global steel market took a plunge. The waterfront, along with much of Duluth, went fallow.

But in 1989, the city built a promenade called the Lakewalk, and the port took off as a tourist destination, with shops and eateries moving into old warehouses. None is more locally focused than Lake Avenue restaurant. Co-owner Derek Snyder sources ingredients like microgreens and heritage pork from the region, and his mushroom comes from an area high school teacher who moonlights as a forager. After 29 years, Snyder's spot is an institution.

Down the road, Tom Hanson has spurred an [story continues on page 74]



About an hour from the Canadian border lies the town of Grand Marais (bottom). There you can replenish calories at World's Best Donuts (center right), learn a new skill at North House Folk School (top right) or enjoy some hospitality at Poplar Haus from co-owners Lynse McDonough and Kippy Kuboy (top left) and Bryan and Stacey Gerrard.



Crispy Walleye with Pickled Fennel & Dill Tartar Sauce

ACTIVE: 1 hr 5 min TOTAL: 1 hr 5 min

One of chef Kippy Kuboy's most popular dishes at the Poplar Haus is his walleye po'boy. Here we serve it deconstructed, but go ahead and pile everything on a soft roll if you like.

TARTAR SAUCE

- ½ cup mayonnaise
- ½ cup chopped fresh dill
- 1 tablespoon diced dill pickle
- 1 small clove garlic, minced
- 1 teaspoon lemon zest
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- ½ teaspoon ground pepper

PICKLED FENNEL

- 1 cup rice vinegar
- ½ cup sugar
- ½ cup chopped fresh dill
- 1 medium bulb fennel, fronds removed, thinly sliced
- 1 tablespoon lemon zest
- ½ cup lemon juice

FISH

- ½ cup all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon Old Bay seasoning
- 1 large egg
- ¾ cup low-fat milk
- 1 cup panko breadcrumbs, preferably whole-wheat
- ½ cup crushed plain kettle-style potato chips
- 1 tablespoon granulated garlic
- 4 4-ounce walleye, catfish or tilapia fillets, patted dry
- 4 tablespoons canola oil
- Pinch of salt
- Lemon wedges for serving

- 1. To prepare tartar sauce:** Combine mayonnaise, ½ cup dill, pickle, minced garlic, 1 teaspoon lemon zest, 1 tablespoon lemon juice and pepper in a medium bowl. Set aside.
- 2. To prepare pickled fennel:** Combine vinegar and sugar in a small saucepan. Heat over medium heat until the sugar dissolves, about 5 minutes. Add dill and remove from heat. Place fennel in a medium bowl and pour the vinegar mixture over it. Stir in lemon zest and lemon juice. Set aside.
- 3. To prepare fish:** Combine flour and Old Bay in a shallow dish. Whisk egg and milk in another shallow dish. Combine panko, potato chips and granulated garlic in a third shallow dish. Dredge fish in the flour, dip in the egg mixture, then coat in the panko mixture.

- 4.** Heat 2 tablespoons oil in a large nonstick skillet over medium-high heat until shimmering. Add the fish and reduce heat to medium. Cook until browned, 2 to 3 minutes. Flip the fish and add the remaining 2 tablespoons oil to the pan. Cook, adjusting heat as necessary, until browned and just cooked through, 2 to 3 minutes more. Sprinkle with salt. Serve the fish with the tartar sauce, pickled fennel and lemon wedges, if desired.

SERVES 4: 4 oz. fish, 3 Tbsp. tartar sauce & ½ cup fennel each

Cal 454 **Fat** 37g (sat 5g) **Chol** 87mg **Carbs** 14g
Total sugars 2g (added 0g) **Protein** 17g **Fiber** 1g
Sodium 471mg **Potassium** 349mg.

Beet-Infused Gin & Tonic

ACTIVE: 10 min TOTAL: 5¼ hrs (including 4 hrs infusing time)

TO MAKE AHEAD: Refrigerate beet-infused gin (Steps 1-4) for up to 1 week.

Roasted beets add earthy sweetness to this riff on a summer classic from Duluth's Lake Avenue Restaurant & Bar. You'll end up with a big batch of infused gin. Experiment as you will—its earthy flavor plays nicely with bitters and amaras in other cocktails.

- 8 cups cubed beets (about 10 medium)
- 8 sprigs fresh rosemary, divided
- 1 750-ml bottle gin
- Ice
- 4 ounces tonic water
- Lemon wedge, beet slice and/or rosemary sprig for garnish

- 1.** Preheat oven to 350°F.
 - 2.** Place beets and 6 rosemary sprigs on a large rimmed baking sheet. Roast, stirring occasionally, until just tender, about 30 minutes.
 - 3.** Discard the rosemary and let the beets cool to room temperature, about 1 hour.
 - 4.** Combine the beets and the remaining 2 rosemary sprigs in a gallon jar or large bowl. Add gin. Cover and let stand in a cool, dark place for at least 4 hours or for up to 3 days. Strain the gin through a fine-mesh sieve (discard the beets and rosemary).
 - 5.** To make each drink: Fill a rocks glass half full with ice. Add 1½ ounces of the gin. Top with tonic water and garnish as desired.
- SERVES 1:** 6 oz. (plus enough gin for about 16 more drinks)
- Cal** 182 **Fat** 0g (sat 0g) **Chol** 0mg **Carbs** 12g
Total sugars 12g (added 11g) **Protein** 0g **Fiber** 0g
Sodium 24mg **Potassium** 38mg.

upturn in the neighborhood known as Lincoln Park. In the two decades since he transitioned his flagship, Duluth Grill, from the national chain it was once part of, he's learned scratch cooking, switched to local sourcing, and built a garden in the parking lot.

While he had to shutter his businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic, laying off hundreds of employees, Hanson found himself in a new role as community organizer. He launched the Lifting Lincoln Park initiative at

the end of March. For a \$50 donation, backers will get a copy of the upcoming OMC Smokehouse cookbook plus a \$15 gift card to a local business. Proceeds were funneled to neighborhood relief projects. "We've uncovered the idea of community here," he said of Duluth. "I don't want to see any of us fail."

BETSY ANDREWS is a food and travel writer and a poet. Her award-winning books include *New Jersey* and *The Bottom*.

Tom Hanson (right) owns Duluth Grill, OMC Smokehouse, Corktown Deli & Brews and Noble Pour. He looked at the COVID-19 pandemic as a sabbatical, allowing him to take a fresh look at his businesses. "My visionary mind gets me in trouble, but also gets me ahead," he said.



Wild Rice Patty Melts

ACTIVE: 45 min TOTAL: 1¼ hrs

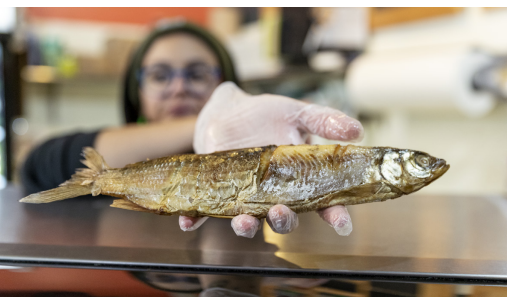
Lots of local ingredients show up on the menu at Tom Hanson's Duluth Grill, like the wild rice in these patties, harvested by Bruce Savage of Spirit Lake Farms.

- 1 cup wild rice
- 1½ teaspoons butter
- 1½ teaspoons extra-virgin olive oil plus 2 tablespoons, divided
- 2 large onions, thinly sliced
- 1½ teaspoons ground cumin
- ¾ teaspoon granulated garlic
- ¾ teaspoon crushed red pepper
- ½ teaspoon ground white pepper
- ¾ cup reduced-fat mayonnaise
- ½ cup crushed cereal squares, such as Chex
- ½ cup finely chopped mushrooms
- ½ cup finely chopped fresh parsley plus 1 teaspoon, divided
- 2 large eggs, lightly beaten
- ¾ cup jarred roasted red peppers, rinsed and finely chopped
- 1 tablespoon red-wine vinegar
- 1½ teaspoons minced garlic
- ¾ teaspoon dried basil
- ¾ teaspoon ground chipotle pepper
- 4 ounces sliced pepper Jack cheese
- 6 slices whole-wheat bread, toasted

1. Bring a large saucepan of water to a boil. Add rice and cook, stirring occasionally, until tender, about 40 minutes. Drain and let cool slightly.
 2. Meanwhile, heat butter and 1½ teaspoons oil in a large skillet over medium heat until the butter stops bubbling. Add onions and cook, stirring occasionally, until they are a deep golden-brown, 35 to 40 minutes.
 3. Position racks in middle and upper thirds of oven; preheat to 350°F. Coat a baking sheet with cooking spray.
 4. Combine cumin, granulated garlic, crushed red pepper and white pepper in a medium bowl. Add the cooled rice, mayonnaise, cereal, mushrooms, ½ cup parsley and eggs; mix well. Scoop the mixture into 6 portions on the prepared pan and shape into patties.
 5. Bake the patties on the middle rack until firm and lightly browned, about 30 minutes.
 6. Meanwhile, whisk the remaining 2 tablespoons oil, 1 teaspoon parsley, peppers, vinegar, minced garlic, basil and chipotle in a small bowl.
 7. Turn broiler to high. Top the patties with cheese. Broil on the top rack until the cheese melts, 1 to 3 minutes. Serve the patties on toast, topped with the onions and vinaigrette.
- SERVES** 6: 1 sandwich each
Cal 492 **Fat** 28g (sat 7g) **Chol** 94mg **Carbs** 45g
Total sugars 5g (added 0g) **Protein** 16g **Fiber** 5g
Sodium 588mg **Potassium** 340mg.

Tyson Cronberg's Beaver House in Grand Marais is known for the enormous walleye "growing" out of the building and the Beaver Flick fishing lure invented by Tyson's brother, Marty.





Beet & Blueberry Salad with Fennel-Mustard Vinaigrette

ACTIVE: 35 min **TOTAL:** 2 hrs 20 min

TO MAKE AHEAD: Refrigerate beets (Steps 1-2) and dressing (Step 3) for up to 1 day.

EQUIPMENT: Spice grinder or mortar and pestle
Chef Scott Graden of New Scenic Café outside Duluth pickles beets to use in the winter, but in summer he cooks them up fresh in preparations like this salad. (Photo: cover.)

- 2 pounds small-to-medium beets
- ½ cup water
- 1 tablespoon fennel seeds, toasted
- 2 tablespoons rice vinegar
- 1½ teaspoons lemon juice
- 1½ teaspoons whole-grain mustard
- 1 small clove garlic, minced
- ½ teaspoon honey
- ¾ teaspoon kosher salt
- ¾ teaspoon ground pepper
- ¾ cup canola oil
- 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- ½ cup fresh blueberries
- ½ cup baby mozzarella balls
- Thinly sliced radishes & microgreens for garnish

1. Preheat oven to 375°F.
 2. Place beets in a 9-inch baking pan, add water and cover with foil. Roast until the beets can be easily pierced with a fork, 1 to 1½ hours. Set aside, uncovered, until cool enough to handle, about 30 minutes. Peel and refrigerate until cold, about 30 minutes.
 3. Grind fennel seeds in a clean spice grinder or with a mortar and pestle. Transfer to a mini food processor and add vinegar, lemon juice, mustard, garlic, honey, salt and pepper. Process until smooth. With the motor running, gradually add canola and olive oils.
 4. Cut the beets to uniform size, halving the smaller ones and quartering the larger ones; place in a medium bowl. Add the vinaigrette and toss to coat. Add berries and mozzarella; toss to coat. Serve topped with radishes and microgreens, if desired.
- SERVES** 6; about ¾ cup each
Cal 273 **Fat** 21g (sat 4g) **Chol** 4mg **Carbs** 18g
Total sugars 12g (added 0.5g) **Protein** 6g **Fiber** 5g
Sodium 233mg **Potassium** 522mg.



Minnesota Nice

At press time, many of these places were closed because of the COVID-19 pandemic. When business is rolling again (fingers crossed), we recommend visiting these spots.

WHERE TO STAY

Pier B Resort's big, wood-paneled rooms overlook Lake Superior close to Duluth's Craft District. pierbresort.com

Grand Marais' modern boutique **Mayhew Inn** boasts rooftop decks and an outdoor lounge. themayhewinn.com

WHERE TO EAT

Duluth's **Lake Avenue** restaurant offers inspired, locally sourced meals and a vivacious drinks list. lakeaveduluth.com

New Scenic Café is a destination for Scandinavian-inflected globalist cuisine. newsceniccafe.com

Grab "beard-wrecker" duck wings at **Poplar Haus** before embarking on a canoe trip. poplarhaus.com

Scratch your smoked-fish itch at **Northern Waters Smokehaus** (top left). northernwaterssmokehaus.com

WHAT TO DO

Learn a new skill like willow basket weaving or moccasin beading at Grand Marais' **North House Folk School**. northhouse.org

Rent a canoe to paddle the area lakes at **Hungry Jack Outfitters**. hjo.com

Smoked Whitefish Salad

ACTIVE: 35 min **TOTAL:** 55 min

Serve this chunky salad from **chef Judi Barsness** on toasted crusty bread, on crackers or mounded over a bed of salad greens.

- 1 pound smoked whitefish or trout, deboned and flaked (about 4 cups)
- ⅓ cup mayonnaise
- ¾ cup diced red bell pepper
- ¾ cup chopped scallions
- ¾ cup chopped celery
- 1½ tablespoons capers, rinsed
- 1½ tablespoons chopped fresh dill, plus more for garnish
- 1½ tablespoons chopped fresh parsley
- 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
- 1½ teaspoons lemon zest, plus more for garnish
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- ¾ teaspoon ground pepper
- Julienned radishes for garnish

Combine fish, mayonnaise, bell pepper, scallions, celery, capers, dill, parsley, mustard, lemon zest, lemon juice and pepper in a medium bowl; mix well. Cover and refrigerate until chilled, about 20 minutes. Serve topped with radishes and more dill and lemon zest, if desired.

MAKES: 4 cups (3-Tbsp. serving)
Cal 52 **Fat** 3g (sat 0g) **Chol** 9mg **Carbs** 0g
Total sugars 0g (added 0g) **Protein** 5g **Fiber** 0g
Sodium 281mg **Potassium** 112mg.

STYLING: JUDY KAM (FOOD), MEGAN HEDGETH (PROP)



Summerberry Pie

ACTIVE: 20 min **TOTAL:** 4 hrs

TO MAKE AHEAD: Refrigerate dough (Step 1) for up to 2 days.

EQUIPMENT: Parchment paper, 9-inch pie pan (not deep-dish)

Highway 61 is the state's unofficial pie trail, and a stop for a slice is a must on a road trip. This recipe is adapted from Rustic Inn Café in Two Harbors.

- ¾ cup all-purpose flour
- ¾ cup whole-wheat pastry flour
- 1 tablespoon granulated sugar plus ½ cup, divided
- ¾ teaspoon salt plus ¼ teaspoon, divided
- 2 tablespoons cold lard or vegetable shortening
- 6 tablespoons canola oil, divided
- 2-4 tablespoons ice water
- ¾ teaspoon distilled white vinegar
- 1½ cups fresh blackberries
- 1½ cups fresh blueberries
- 1½ cups fresh raspberries
- 1½ cups quartered fresh strawberries
- 6 tablespoons cornstarch
- 1 teaspoon lime juice
- ⅓ cup rolled oats
- 3 tablespoons packed light brown sugar

1. Whisk all-purpose flour, pastry flour, 1 tablespoon sugar and ¼ teaspoon salt in a medium bowl. Crumble lard (or shortening) into the bowl and toss to coat. Add 3 tablespoons oil, 2 tablespoons water and vinegar; stir to evenly moisten the dough. Add more water, 1 tablespoon at a time, if necessary. Shape the dough into a 4-inch disk. Wrap in plastic and refrigerate for at least 1 hour or for up to 1 day.
 2. Mix blackberries, blueberries, raspberries, strawberries, cornstarch and lime juice in a medium bowl with the remaining ⅓ cup sugar and ¼ teaspoon salt. Let stand, stirring occasionally, for 15 minutes.
 3. Position racks in middle and lower third of oven; preheat to 425°F. Place a rimmed baking sheet on the lower rack (to catch any drips).
 4. Roll the dough between two pieces of floured parchment into an 11-inch circle. Peel off the top piece of parchment and carefully invert the dough into a 9-inch pie pan (not deep-dish). Peel off the remaining parchment. Patch any rips in the dough. Trim and crimp the edges.
 5. Fill the crust with the berry mixture. Mix oats, brown sugar and the remaining 3 tablespoons oil in a medium bowl. Sprinkle over the berries.
 6. Bake the pie for 20 minutes. Reduce oven temperature to 350°F. Continue baking until the filling is bubbling, 50 to 60 minutes more. Let cool completely before serving, about 1½ hours.
- SERVES** 10; 1 slice each
Cal 307 **Fat** 12g (sat 2g) **Chol** 2mg **Carbs** 49g
Total sugars 24g (added 19g) **Protein** 3g **Fiber** 5g
Sodium 206mg **Potassium** 145mg. 🍴