

FINE DINING IN MARTINSVILLE



(l-r) Crystal Taylor, Kody Brandenburg, Misty Millis, Matt Harakal, and Steve Martinez.
Photo by Martin Boling

Matt Harakal

Chef/Owner,

21 North Eatery & Cellar

Chef Matt Harakal credits his employees with helping 21 North Eatery & Cellar reach its three-year anniversary, particularly in the midst of a global pandemic. “Without them, we wouldn’t be here,” he says, adding that his staff was especially instrumental in helping the restaurant survive such uncertain times this year.

“A lot of business owners—chef owners—they’re not going to bounce back, they’re closing up, and I can’t help the people I’ve worked together with over the years in this industry,” he says. “My heart goes out to them. I’m working hard to keep the spirit to serve alive for them. It’s just terrible.”

After having been the restaurant’s executive chef, Harakal took ownership of 21 North, located at 21 N. Jefferson St. in Martinsville, Indiana, when Connie and Tony Musgrave sold the business and relocated two years ago. An Ohio native with a Ukrainian and French background, Harakal graduated from Johnson & Wales University in North Miami, Florida, and trained under French Master and Michelin-starred chefs.

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, Harakal had to cancel menus and events already planned, like a big party for St. Patrick’s Day and a Chef’s Table ready to go. The latter is a tasting event that pairs local breweries or distilleries with five different courses, helping to bring attention to new companies and their products. For the Chef’s Tables, Harakal designs plates and foods not served every day to present an educational and fun time for everyone. “The Chef’s Tables are great times to focus and have an intimate conversation with 20 to 30 people that want to sit down and have a little secluded club,” he says.

While he hopes to hold those types of events again soon, Harakal had to cancel them in March to keep customers and employees safe. “For the events we had planned, we had probably

40 reservations and got the notice like everybody else to shut down, but we made it,” he says, adding that time allowed him to diversify the menu—offering comfort foods like meatloaf and fried chicken dinners—and a three-way liquor license meant he could sell cans and bottles of alcohol. “We really had to pull our talents together to see how we were going to pull this off, but we’ve had a great response.”

Even though 2020 has been an unpredictable year, Harakal feels encouraged about the future. He’s planning Christmas parties, with brunches and Chef’s Tables restarting after the first of the year, as well as kickstarting off-premise and home catering. He is continuing to transition into a seasonal menu for winter, with items such as root vegetables and slow-roasted dishes. “This is my favorite time of year to cook, so there’s a lot of thought going into the menu, like seasonal beers and also seasonal game, whether it’s Wagyu beef or turkey or duck, we are going to keep that going.”

To enhance offerings while staying true to his mission to support local, Harakal is working with Indiana and Kentucky farmers, vendors, and places like Mooresville’s new Black Dog Brewery, while also investing in wines from France and Italy that people may not have tried before. “We’re trying to continue supporting local, because they’ve taken a real hit and suffered a lot, too.”

Through all the trials and plans moving forward, Harakal says his employees have given their all for the restaurant’s success. “I’m very proud of our staff because, without them, we wouldn’t be able to do this,” he says. “I’d have to take a one-man show to a deli somewhere and try to put out some really crazy foods. It’s super tough for everybody this year, but they’ve been great. I couldn’t ask for a better group.”

For information, visit 21northeateryandcellar.com.
—Linda Margison