



# A Decade of Dan and an All-Star Review



I'm approaching a milestone. I've been traveling the back roads of Virginia, writing about great places to eat, for nearly 10 years.

In this pursuit, I've dined at more than 100 restaurants; but I've only written about the ones I enjoyed most. I've also enjoyed the emails from *Cooperative Living* readers who've shared their favorite restaurants, many of which became subjects for **Dining With Dan**.

A question I'm often asked is, "How do you decide which restaurants to write about?" I wanted my first article in 2007 to

set the tone for any that followed. I tried at least 10 restaurants before finding one I thought

was really good. That restaurant was *It's About Thyme* in Culpeper, Virginia. The restaurant had all the attributes I was looking for: great chef, excellent food, ample menu options, and a personality that led to a great dining experience.

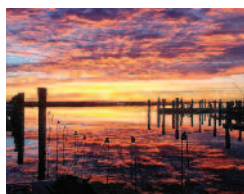
Sometimes the purpose of eating out is just a "fuel stop," and that's okay — sometimes that is how it has to be. However, at other times, dining out should be special and should be shared with someone special. I once heard a French chef say, "Don't tell me what you eat. Tell me who you eat with."

In the beginning, I developed a checklist of criteria to guide my restaurant-selection process: imaginative and caring chef; careful food sourcing; attentive and cheerful serving staff; and attractive surroundings. These attributes shape a restaurant's personality and make dining out a special experience. All the restaurants you've read about in **Dining With Dan** scored high marks in each of these areas and basked in a personality I thought readers would enjoy.

I'm also asked which of these restaurants I liked best. The short answer is, "I enjoyed each one!" Life is too short to drink bad wine or write about bad restaurants. I want readers to have only pleasant dining experiences. However, there are some restaurants that stand out in memory. In response to many requests over the years, I've listed on the next page the restaurants from **Dining With Dan** I consider superstars, establishments I believe would be finalists in a Super Bowl of Virginia's "Blue Plate Legends."

As a travel guide and aid in planning road trips, you may want to keep this copy of *Cooperative Living* handy in your vehicle, briefcase or purse. And, finally, one last word of advice: Things change over time, so call ahead to make sure you know hours of operation and even menu selections. Comments? Email [dwalker123@comcast.net](mailto:dwalker123@comcast.net).

Be of Good Cheer, and as Roy Rogers once said, "Until we meet again, may the good Lord take a liking to you." ■



# The Finalists in a Super Bowl of Virginia's Blue Plate Legends, and the Winners Are ...

## Imaginative and Talented Chefs:

- Margaret Moorefield, *Bistro 1888*, South Boston, 434-572-1888 (August 2007)
- Melody Bowers, *Tavern on the Rail*, Mineral, 540-872-7245 (March-April 2008)
- George Huger, *Southern Inn*, Lexington, 540-463-3612 (November-December 2015)

## Romantic Restaurants:

- *Tuscarora Mill*, Leesburg, 703-771-9300 (March-April 2011)
- *Palisades*, Eggleston, 540-626-2828 (September 2012)

## Authentic Italian:

- *Trattoria Villagio*, Clifton, 703-543-2030 (February 2015)
- *Bizzotto's*, Onanock, 757-787-3103 (November-December 2011)

## Authentic French:

- *It's About Thyme*, Culpeper, 540-825-4264 (January 2007)
- *L'Auberge Provencale*, White Post, 800-638-1702 (November-December 2012)

## Comfort Food Like Grandma Served:

- *The Homeplace*, Catawba, 540-384-7252 (June 2007)
- *Nottoway Restaurant*, Warfield, 804-478-7875 (February 2016)
- *Tanglewood Ordinary*, Maidens, 804-556-3284 (September 2016)

## Seafood by the Seashore:

- *Merroir*, Topping, 804-758-2871 (February 2012)
- *The Island House*, Wachapreague, 757-787-4242 (July 2016)

## Day Starter's Delight:

- *Mrs. Rowe's*, Staunton, 540-886-1833 (January 2010)
- *The Virginia Diner*, Wakefield, 800-339-3463 (July 2011)
- *MarieBette*, Charlottesville, 434-529-6118 (May 2016)

## Bar-Be-Que Heaven

- *Cowling's Bar Be Que*, Waverly, 804-834-3100 (January 2008)
- *Bar Be Que Exchange*, Gordonsville, 540-832-0227 (July 2013)

## Steak to Drive for:

- *Drug Store Grill*, Brookneal, 434-376-2116 (July 2014)
- *Perky's*, Altavista, 434-369-9908 (May 2015)

## Destination Retreats:

- *Water Wheel Restaurant at the Inn at Gristmill Square*, Warm Springs, 540-839-2231 (November-December 2013)
- *The Inn at Tabbs Creek*, Mathews, 804-725-5136 (September 2014)

## Gone ... but not forgotten:

- *Good Eats Café* (October 2007)
- *Capt. Jack's Crab Shack* (October 2009)
- *Southern Sisters* (August 2010)
- *Town Bistro* (January 2011) ■



Traveling sisters Marie Jordan (left) and Kay Scott visited each of the restaurants that were featured in the magazine.

## IMAGINATIVE AND TALENTED CHEFS



Melody and Kenneth Bowers of *Tavern on the Rail* in Mineral.



George and Sue Ann Huger of *Southern Inn* in Lexington.



Barbara Cage and Margaret Moorefield of *Bistro 1888* in South Boston.

