

Deep Dish

The Last HURRAH

By Marialisa Calta

AUTUMN IS ALL ABOUT THE last hurrah — the final spate (if we're lucky) of warm weather, the last of the harvest from gardens and farms, the flurry of activity (stacking wood, making pickles, sealing windows) before winter sets in.

Let's go to the FAIR

As far as say-goodbye-to-summer celebrations go, fairs are tops. At Vermont's agricultural fairs, the 4-H'ers get to show off their heifers and the rest of us get to ogle humungous pumpkins and zucchini, towering sunflowers and prizewinning baked goods, maple products, eggs and honey. It's enough to make a body hungry.

"People go to the fair to eat," says Marla Calico of the International Association of Fairs and Expositions in Springfield, Missouri. "And, by and large, they are not looking for health food." Hence the popularity of deep-fried-you-name-it-on-a-stick: pickles, macaroni and cheese, candy bars, Twinkies, meatballs, Tater Tots, even peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. Here in Vermont, says Alan Howe, who engages the food concessions for the Tunbridge World's Fair, the fair-going populace has yet to embrace many of the fried novelties (like Twinkies), but corn dogs, deep-fried battered onions, fried dough and good old-fashioned French fries still have avid fans. Vermonters also like their sausage sandwiches, roasted corn on the cob and barbecue, a relative and popular newcomer to the fair scene here. Other trends in fair food? Ethnic goodies (Szechwan noodles, samosas) and coffee-bar drinks (iced cappuccino, chai). ♦ **Champlain Valley Fair**, August 25–September 3, Essex Junction. The biggest of them all, drawing nearly 300,000 visitors over its 10-day run, most of whom make a beeline for vendors like Mr. Sausage or Mrs. Steak. The dairy bar sponsored by the Chittenden County Dairy Promotion Board always does a brisk business. And the deservedly famous Al's French Fries of South Burlington has several outlets on the fairgrounds.

Last year saw the introduction of the "lunch ticket": Walk in at noon and leave before 2 p.m. and you get the price of admission refunded, although parking fees still apply. (802-878-5545, www.cvfair.com)

♦ **Vermont State Fair**, August 31–September 9, Rutland. The "America's Best Eats" page of the foodie Web site epicurious.com, names this as one of the top 10 fairs in the country, singling out Vermont cheddar and "products that highlight the state's maple syrup



Jeb Wallace-Brodeur

bounty," including maple-flavored cotton candy and doughnuts.

♦ **Tunbridge World's Fair**, September 13–16. Anyone who has polished off a rack of ribs from Superchef BBQ knows that good 'cue has come north. Look for the big black smoker with the steer skull on one end. Or try to get a serving of Vermont BBQ's slow-smoked pulled pork; last year pitmeister Pauline Poulin of Braintree sold out early. Head up to the building run by the Orange County Sugar Makers for some maple cotton candy or detour to Brookfield resident Doreen Salls' stand, where she sells local corn, roasted over a charcoal fire and slathered with Cabot butter.

The fair also has its own cookbook, *Floral Hall Recipes*, containing nearly 150 recipes from past prizewinners, fair volunteers and community members. (802-889-5555, www.tunbridgefair.com)

Cider Rules

By 1775, one out of every 10 farms in New England operated its own cider mill, writes Ben Watson in *Cider, Hard and Sweet*. Unable to grow hops and wheat for beer and ale, and finding the cost of importing such potables from England too steep, early settlers tried brewing from pumpkins, maple sap, corn and molasses. No dice. Apples, however, thrived in the new world, and hard cider became the drink of choice. In 1767, reports Watson, per capita consumption in Massachusetts reached 35 gallons.

But the cider culture waned for a variety of reasons: urban migration, the

growth of large-scale commercial orchards growing apples for shipping, but not cider; several seasons of freakish, orchard-destroying weather, and the burgeoning Temperance movement, which equated relatively low-alcohol hard cider with, Watson writes, "demon rum." Slowly, however, interest in cider, particularly in finely crafted hard cider, appears to be growing again in both the U.S. and Europe.

Vermont has more than a dozen cider mills, says the state Agriculture Agency's Steven Justis, and probably as many smaller mills. Thus, folks might certainly buy cider from one of New England's largest producers, Cold Hollow Cider Mill in Waterbury Center (802-244-8771, 800-327-7537, www.coldhollow.com), which produces the non-alcoholic, pasteurized cider

(or "sweet cider") sold everywhere from the mill itself to mom-and-pop stores to huge supermarket chains. Or they might visit a tiny producer like Terry Bradshaw of Lost Meadow Orchard and Cider Mill in Calais (www.lostmeadowvt.com), who makes traditional "orchard-crafted" hard cider for the consumption of his friends and family. Of the commercial producers of hard cider, Bradshaw, a serious student of the beverage, names as "the real deal" Flag Hill Farm in Vershire (802-685-7724, www.flaghillfarm.com), makers of sparkling and still "cyder," and North River Winery in Jacksonville (802-368-7557, 800-585-7779, www.northriverwinery.com), makers of Metcalfe's Hard Cider.

Give Thanks for PIE

In her cookbook *Yankee Hill Country Cooking* (Stephen Green Press, 1963) author Beatrice Vaughan of East Thetford wrote that in her grandmother's day, "a week's supply of pies was usually made on Saturday and stored on a high shelf in the back pantry." Who knows how many that might be, but a conscientious farmwife with husband, children and perhaps hired help to feed might be presumed to have been busy with her rolling pin. Adjust for the fact that pie for breakfast was a farm tradition and you can assume that pie was considered a staple. Today, of course, we look at pie as a treat. In the "it's-hard-work-but-someone's-got-to-do-it" spirit, we've found some of the state's best bakers. Most have the usual Thanksgiving pies — apple, pumpkin, pecan and mincemeat — plus berry pies (often seasonal), cream pies and others. We've tried to point out specialties worthy of note; order early!

♦ **Amy's Bakery Arts Cafe**, 113 Main Street, Brattleboro. Amy's might be more renowned for its cakes, but don't overlook the pies! For a change, try the pumpkin whoopie pies. (802-251-1071)

♦ **Grandma Miller's Pies and Pastries**, South Londonderry. Grandma Dorothy Miller's Iowa farmwife baking prowess has been passed down in her family to grandson David Nunnikhoven, who runs this bakery with his wife, Lynne. (802-824-4032, www.cohoinn.com)



Kerry Sherck

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◆ **Mendon Mountain Orchards**, Mendon. Legend has it that Calvin Coolidge used to stop by. Apple pie is the biggest seller, but don't miss the maple walnut pie and the apple turnovers. (802-775-5477, www.mendonorchards.com)

◆ **Delicate Decadence**, Barre. The chocolate vegan pie (no animal shortening) has become unexpectedly popular; the maple cream pie also flies off the shelves. (802-479-7948)

◆ **Gesine Confectionary & Gourmet Market**, Montpelier. This bakery won the hearts of Montpelierites with stellar coffee and macaroons, but the pies are superb. Caramel apple and cranberry strudel are Thanksgiving specials. (802-224-9930, www.gesine.com)

◆ **Connie's Kitchen**, Center Road, Hardwick. Traditionalists who typically use lard and butter in their crust, Connie Kapusta and daughter Terry Coolbeth also make their mincemeat pies with beef; hence the truth behind their sign: "Specializing in old-fashioned baking." At holidays, folks also line up for their dinner rolls. (802-472-6607)

◆ **Shelburne Orchards**, Shelburne. Apple only, if you're lucky (last year, they were out of pie by Halloween). (802-985-2753, www.shelburneorchards.com)

◆ **The Parker Pie Co.**, West Glover. This tiny eatery at the back of the general store is known for its pizza, but the dessert pie offerings are top of the line. (802-525-3366, www.parkerpie.com)

◆ **Mirabelles**, Burlington. Among the pie offerings at this popular bakery/cafe are (meatless) mincemeat pie, from an old English recipe handed down by co-owner Alison Lane's grandmother, and the bourbon pecan pie recipe used by her mom when the family lived in southern climes. (www.mirabellescafe.com, 802-658-3074)

◆ **Allenholm Farm**, South Hero. You've missed "Papa Ray's" famous cherry and raspberry pies (seasonal specialties), but hang on for apple and pumpkin, both made with fruit grown on the farm. (802-372-5566, www.allenholm.com)

◆ **Cinta's Bake Shop**, Derby. This home-style bakery deserves a more prominent location than the corner of a gift shop on Route 5. But from her corner, Jacinta Ahrens bakes up fragrant pies with flaky crusts. (802-766-5080) 🍌

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