

Eat Local: Open a Package, Jar, Bottle or Box



TOPO DISTILLERY

Located in Chapel Hill, makers of organic vodka, gin, moonshine and aged whiskey, The Top of the Hill Distillery is the only USDA Certified Organic, local and sustainable distillery in the Deep South. Their gold medal winning TOPO Organic Eight Oak Whiskey, award winning TOPO Organic Vodka and TOPO Organic Piedmont Gin; and the TOPO Organic Moonshine Carolina Whiskey are all hand-crafted from organic Carolina soft red winter wheat grown less than 100 miles from Chapel Hill, North Carolina. The vodka and gin both are distilled with a lovely mix of botanicals, making them more flavorful and interesting when it comes to all of your Springtime craft cocktail mixing.

Tour the distillery most Thursdays at 6 pm, Fridays at 6 & 7:30 pm, and most Saturdays at 3 & 4:30 pm. Also by appointment – call 919.699.8703. You may arrange for a private tasting for groups up to 100 by emailing the distillery at raiseyourglass@topodistillery.com. The distillery is available for private parties or receptions, inquire at events@TheTopOfTheHill.com. Learn more at topodistillery.com.

Not only are TOPO spirits delicious in the glass, but did you know you can bake with them as well? Just a tablespoon or two of vodka or gin is the new secret ingredient for the perfect flaky-as-can-be pie crust. And, for flaky-as-can-be pie crust and for the perfect vanilla, simply pour a pint of TOPO vodka in a glass jar or cruet and infuse with two split vanilla beans for a couple of weeks. As you start to use up this flavorful extract, simply add more vodka, as the color starts to lighten, add another split bean. Find more recipes using TOPO Distillery Organic Liquors at HeidiBillottoFood.com

TEXT BY HEIDI BILLOTTO PHOTOGRAPHY BY HEIDI BILLOTTO & GERIN CHOINIERE

Once you start to look around and read a label or two it really is unbelievable how many local brands you will find across the Carolinas. This food writer is thrilled to have the opportunity to highlight six favorites this season with a bit about each company as well as the where-to-find-them details.

For more info and recipes using each of these Local Got To Be NC products, check out the Eat Local: Springtime Edition Blog post now up at HeidiBillottoFood.com

CURLEY TAIL CANDIED BACON

In the mood for something a little sweet and a little salty or maybe a little sweet and a little spicy? Then the crisp and crunchy Curley Tail Candied Bacon line has your name all over it! Produced in Charlotte, it's one of the newest products that's taking the market by storm. Even for people who may be over the everything-is-better-with-bacon mantra, these thick cut slices of classic candied bacon and the zesty habanero variety make the perfect high protein snack or addition to any recipe – from that summertime Bloody Mary to the perfect wedge salad. Try it on burgers, BLTs OR in any recipe that calls for crumbled sausage for a tasty new take on things.

It all started when Curley Tail owner and creator Gene Pavone was looking for a new idea to give as a gift for his family and friends. He knew they loved bacon and started playing around with a few recipes – as he says, he had a culinary epiphany one day and the rest, as they say, is history.

Honestly it's the best candied bacon I've ever tasted. I keep waffling between the Sweet Brown Sugar variety and the Smoked Habanero version which has a bit more of a bite! Both products are boxed in a number of sizes and are shelf stable for 90 days before opening. After that keep any uneaten pieces in the fridge. (Believe me, this won't be an issue – once you open a pack – you'll eat every sweet, spicy, lip-smacking slice!)

Also enjoy it crumbled over salads, on soups and a flavor packed ingredient in hundreds of other dishes. This is bacon and then some!

Like lots of the North Carolina products here, Gene is spreading the GotToBeNC word in 18 different states across the country.

In Charlotte, the Curley Tail products are available online or at Bruce Julian's Clothiers on Selwyn Avenue. For more info or to order a taste for yourself and your friends, visit curleytail.com.



BRUCE JULIAN HERITAGE FOODS

This line of sassy, Southern-inspired foods and beverage makings started in Charlotte at Bruce Julian Clothiers men's shop where Bruce would regularly offer customers a made-from-scratch Bloody Mary while they shopped. The mix became so popular and so many people asked for his recipe, that they bottled it! While it makes a delicious Spring and Summer beverage it's also a great ingredient in paella, ratatouille, shrimp and grits, meatballs and more.

But, that's not all... the Bloody Mary mix is just the start of the story. Enter Bruce's wife Bonnie and the couple's business partner Paul Raybin. With a little marketing ingenuity, it didn't take the group long to figure out that drink rimming spices and pickled vegetables – delicious spicy Brussels sprouts and zesty okra just to name a few – were a great addition to the line. And as more local North Carolina products like GMO free grits and thin sliced country ham were included under the label, the brand became



Bruce Julian Heritage Foods.

This Charlotte born line of Southern-inspired flavors is now available online, across the state of North Carolina and in 23 other states and five Canadian Provinces – way to spread the GotToBeNC word!! In Charlotte, look for the complete line at Bruce Julian Clothiers on Selwyn Ave. and a variety of items from the line at Blackhawk Hardware at Park Road Shopping Center, Pasta & Provisions on Providence Road, most Harris Teeters and Publix stores and more. Many area restaurants also pour the Bruce Julian Bloody Mary Mix. For details visit bruce-julian-bloody-mary.myshopify.com

GRASS-FED PRODUCTIONS / ROOT DOWN FOODS

As is the way with many small family-owned companies, necessity is the mother of invention. Grass-fed Productions/Root Down Foods owner and creator Ann Jacks was looking for a source for butter made from the cream of local grass fed dairy cows; but, alas, she came up empty handed – so she started to make her own. Grass-Fed Productions/Rootdown Foods is a one-woman, Charlotte-based company that believes in producing quality food. Each small-batch, hand crafted item is created using as many local ingredients as possible. Ann specializes in cultured butter in plain, salted and a variety of flavors; ghee; gluten full and gluten-free butter crackers; grass-fed beef bone broth and free-range poultry bone broth; and more.

The ghee is a non-dairy product made by simmer-

ing down the butter until the milk solids separate. Ghee has a rich toasty flavor and can be used in place of butter or olive oil. It is dairy free, lactose free and does not have to be refrigerated.

Grass-fed Productions/Root Down Foods are available in Charlotte regularly at Orrman's Cheese Shop at 7th Street Market uptown and Berrybrook Farm on East Blvd.; Saturdays at the NoDa Farmers' Market and the Atherton Farmers' Market on South Blvd. from 9am-noon; Wednesdays at the Highland Creek Farmers' Market from 4-7pm and the Selwyn Farmers' Market from 3-7 pm; and Thursdays at the University Farmers' Market from 3:30-6:30pm. For more information visit them on Facebook at facebook.com/begrassfed.



GARNET GALS JAMS AND JELLIES

I love that this column this issue has a focus on family run companies, and Garnet Gals is no exception. This company is the result of family recipes and the efforts of mom and daughter, Andrea and Megan Lambert. As a professional pastry chef and teacher at the Johnson & Wales campus in Charlotte, Megan is no stranger to the sweeter side of life. The concept of creating jams and jellies from local products was inspired by Megan's grandmother, Garnet Spencer, who used to put up the fruits and veggies she grew in her home-garden.

Today the line of jams, jellies, chutneys and apple butter is totally made with seasonally harvested produce from local farms in a creative and ever changing line up of flavors such as Peach Basil, Blueberry Ginger, Salisbury Blueberry, Chamborcin Raspberry and more. Garnet Gals supports local farms such as Bush N Vine, Dover Farms and Vineyards, Perry Lowe Farms, Windcrest Farms, Harmony Ridge Farms, Barbee Farms, Lineberger Farms, plus others. Use these sweet spreads on sand-

wiches or morning toast with cottage cheese or peanut or almond butter; over cream cheese as an appetizer or as a glaze for your favorite grilled seafood, pork or poultry.

Because of their small batch hands on production process, Garnet Gals can create special more personalized flavors to help you celebrate the sweet moments in your life. Call them directly at 919.949.5404 about custom made favors for weddings, baby showers, customer and employee appreciation events, and special birthdays.

Order online at GarnetGals.com or look for the black and white, "Life is sweet" label on the shelves at Orrman's Cheese Shop at 7th Street Station in uptown Charlotte; at Vin Master Wine Shoppe on South Blvd., at Earls Grocery on Elizabeth Avenue in Charlotte. On Saturdays at the Charlotte Regional Farmers' Market on Yorkmont Road in Charlotte at the Bosky Acres booth and at the Mount Holly Farmers' Market at 130 South Main Street. For more info visit GarnetGals.com.



CODDLE CREEK FARMS NUT BUTTERS AND HONEY

Located in Mooresville, NC, Coddle Creek Farms is a third generation family-owned honey farm with bees producing honey in and around the Mooresville area and in the North Carolina mountains as well. In fact, the Coddle Creek honey and photos of bee keeper in charge Steve Young is featured in salad dressings and more in the Charlotte locations of the fresh salad concept restaurant chain, Chop't Creative Salad Company with Charlotte locations at Park Road Shopping Center and at Blakeney Shopping Center. But as honey is a seasonal crop, Steve and his wife decided to expand the line of food items with a delicious line of nut butters, just like Steve's mom used to make. Mama Young's Nut Butter come in Smooth and Crunchy Peanut Butter varieties, in an Almond and my favorite Chocolate Peanut Butter.

The products are all natural and are sweetened with the Coddle Creek Honey. Great on sandwiches and in sauces, but just wait till you taste the Chocolate Peanut Butter in my Sea Salted Chocolate Peanut Butter Cake –

the recipe is up now on my Blog at HeidiBilottoFood.com! If you go to the farm store in Mooresville, you can also taste their homemade breads all made from Mama Young's recipes with Mama Young's 100 year old starter, and buy chicken and duck eggs fresh from the farm as well.

Coddle Creek Farms honey and nut butters are also available at Local Cabarrus, Iredell and Mecklenburg County farmers' markets, specialty stores and farm stands around the state including but not limited to Coddle Creek Market in Mooresville; Rhino Market in Charlotte; Orrman's Cheese Shop in Charlotte; Maddy Fatties in Cornelius; The Bradford Store in Huntersville; Josh's Market in Mooresville; True South Store in Mooresville; Charlotte Regional Farmers Market on Yorkmont Road; Piedmont Farmers Market in Concord; Dover Vineyards in Concord, NC; Peachtree Market in Concord; Shop & Save in Mooresville; Savory Spice Shop Huntersville; and Sugar Pops in Mooresville. Visit them at facebook.com/coddlecreekhoneyfarm/

Rama Swim & Racquet Club

9th Annual JIMMY JAM Music Festival

Sunday, May 21 at 12 PM - 6 PM

Jimmy Jam will benefit The Allegro Foundation - a non-profit organization that works with over 700 local children with disabilities. www.allegrofoundation.net

Please join us for our fourth annual Jimmy Jam! This is our annual celebration of the life of dear friend to many, Jimmy Oakley, who lost his battle with cancer in 2013.

Check out this years line up!

- Carolina Gator
- Gumbo
- Snarky Truth
- Lenny Federal Band
- Analog Daze
- Randy Franklin and The Sardines

More info at FaceBook/JIMMY JAM IV

This year there will be a Grand Finale Jam featuring ALL the bands. In other words history will be made!

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