

Blockade Runner kitchen notches up the freshness

by Brian Freskos

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Fresh has come full-swing at the Blockade Runner Resort on 275 Waynick Boulevard.

The resort has begun serving lettuce and herbs grown on the property by groundskeeper, Aubrey Doggett, who has begun growing produce interspersed with the landscaping. And soon, said executive chef, Mark Lawson, Doggett will begin growing vegetables too.

The growing of their own herbs and vegetables is more than just an effort to provide the freshest ingredients to their customers, it underscores the growing trend to buy locally and to protect the environment.

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Staff photo by Allison Breiner

Chef Mark Lawson uses greens grown on site at the Blockade Runner Resort to prepare salads for the hotel's restaurant, East.



salad that's been picked that day, it's noticeably different,” Lawson said. “It's as fresh as it can be. It hasn't lost any of the nutrients that were formerly in it. It hasn't lost any of the cell structure, and it's just a better product.” Doggett's lettuces and parsley were a big hit on the hotel's Easter buffet tables.

We're trying to identify and use as many North Carolina products as we can,” he added. “If you can make it, it's cheaper than if you buy it ... and we're trying to do good for the environment.”

He said for example that he makes sure to buy pineapples that come from Costa Rica instead of Hawaii because it takes less fuel to transport them.

Lawson said another reason for buying locally is that it actually helps the resort's business. A lot of the resort's customers live around the state. So by purchasing locally, it assists those local businesses and thus the employees of those businesses benefit as well; and when the employees have more money to spend, then they are more likely to visit a resort.

Lawson said the resort has a greenhouse across the drawbridge, off Wrightsville Avenue. The plants are kept there for a time until they are ready to be moved to the resort, where they will stay until harvested.

Doggett began growing lettuce last November and Lawson said the food service has not purchased any greens since October.

In addition to the 12 different kinds of lettuce there is a variety of herbs such as basil, thyme, parsley and rosemary.

In time there will be vegetables like tomatoes and cucumbers, along with squash, zucchini and peppers all freshly grown on the grounds.

“Eventually we're going to have a working farm here,” Lawson said.

Lawson, 40, is a veteran chef. He made Wilmington his base in 1986 and has been cooking in the area ever since. His style is one that can change on a whim, he said. But in general, he enjoys basic pairing and simplicity,

and taking classical dishes and adding his own touch to them.

Outside the Blockade Runner on April 10 he stood, the sun beating down into his eyes, offering a sample of the resort's freshly grown arugula. He bent down and pinched a nutty, peppery leaf out of the ground.

The arugula is a bit strong, Lawson said, and it has sort of a pepper-kick to it, but mixed with his house-made raspberry vinaigrette dressing, the two make a perfect pairing.