

FOOD & DRINK www.taranakidailynews.co.nz

The energy behind Chaos

When Kerry Vosseler goes home for peace and quiet the bees buzz. Tending to hives on the Oakura property she shares with her husband, Mark Brennan, induces a sense of calm. The bees and the garden - that's where the stress ebbs away. The bees are a fitting analogy. She's a bundle of energy, an engaging, quick-talking person with a successful central city cafe and a reputation among colleagues. At this year's Taranaki Halamoana Hospitality awards - held annually for the local industry - she was voted Outstanding Owner/Operator. Her cafe, Chaos in New Plymouth's Brougham St, was named best cafe for the third time.

She's not blasé about the wins. "Oh yeah. It's amazing. I got to stand up on stage and say thanks to my staff, thanks to the supporters, thanks to the sponsors and thanks to my family."

Nine years ago she opened Chaos and at the time was still running Green Ginger cafe in Oakura. That was a summer-only business while Chaos was all-year round. Running the two got too much. She couldn't be in two places at once and, for a person proud of her people skills and customer knowledge, this wasn't ideal.

Green Ginger had been pivotal in her hospitality career. It was the first time she'd owned a cafe. Up till then she'd worked mostly for other people or been a caterer.

For years she has loved to cook. As a child growing up in Stratford she cooked alongside her grandmother.

She jokes that she needed a chair to reach the sink and started only because "I got to lick the bowl."

"By the time I was 10 my grandmother would leave me to cook lunch for my granddad. He never complained."

Her offering was probably crumbed lamb chops: The dish still remains a favourite.

At 16 she had a job at Dawson Falls eatery, working alongside the late Keith Anderson, founder of the Stratford Mountain House.

After school she travelled and lived in Australia, doing stints "six weeks here or six weeks there".

She learnt about food in the more cosmopolitan country of Oz, working front of house in restaurants and coming home to penzance cookbooks.

Back in New Plymouth she worked as assistant (or trainee - she can't remember) manager at Pizzeria Hut. Next up was a stint at the Eggmont Steam Flour Mill restaurant in the former Mill building on Powderham St.

By now it was the late 1980s. When Centre City opened, she rented space and set up the Italian Kitchen in the shopping centre foodcourt.

"It was a bit ahead of its time really. A lot of people didn't know how to pronounce lasagne... and minestrone - nobody knew what that was."

When that closed, she worked nights as a temporary chef, filling in for other full-timers while being a mum to two daughters during the day.

"I used to call myself the bridesmaid, never the bride because I worked like one or two nights a week... I could never ever write a menu because I was the fill-in."

But she worked alongside plenty of great male colleagues. At that point I didn't know if I could really cook. I used to think if I didn't keep cooking I would lose my skills, even though those skills were an unknown quantity.

"Then my Dad died and I thought it was time to stand up and put my money where my mouth was."

She headed to Witi in 2002 to study professional cookery for a year. Initially she thought she wanted to tutor others - still does, in fact, although she'd rather teach those who want to learn and be pragmatic enough to know that doesn't always happen.

She had her piece of paper, she was 45 and the Samurai summer was on the horizon.

"We opened it [Green Ginger in



Foodie personality: Outstanding owner/operator Kerry Vosseler has won the title three times at the Taranaki Halamoana Awards, but still fizzes about the accolade. PHOTOS: ANDY JACKSON/FAIRFAX NZ

Oakura] the year Tom Cruise came to town [for the making of the *Lost Samurai*] and we had the most beautiful summer. All of our customers used to sit out on the road by the fish and chip shop. We would have our tables with the broilies and then they would be overflowing. It used to look really good."

"The family lived on two and a half hectares at Oakura where animals galore - ducks, goats, geese, horses, rabbits - roamed. It was a busy life."

"I think I'd always appreciated how much hard work was involved and I didn't want to get fully self-employed until I felt my family was mature enough."

In 2004 she opened Chaos, but running two establishments to her standards was tough.

"Realistically something like this is hard to operate unless it's owner-operated. A lot of the success of Chaos - people would say - comes down to my passion and the fact I'm a perfectionist."

These days she's learnt work-home separation.

"I don't go home and read cookbooks any more to go to bed. Once upon a time I'd go home and work out what fabulous creations I was going to whip up the next day."

So perhaps it's less consuming but also she's surer of her abilities.

"I think probably I'm more confident to throw things together. Also my brain is a bit whizzy so reading a novel rather than a cookbook slows me down."

The borderline hyperactivity of that 10-year-old frying granddad's lamb chops hasn't waned.



Precious sweets: Macaroons look like sugar-coated jewels. These are one of the few items not made on site - almost everything else is baked or cooked in the cafe kitchens.

"I think I would have been on Ritalin if I was like this as a child," she says wryly, referring to the medication for ADHD children.

On Tuesday she swims several kilometres at the Port. At home the garden, the bees and an old villa the family has renovated encourages relaxation.

"If you are hyper with bees you get stung. "We have an orchard and were not getting a lot of fruit so I bought a couple of hives and we lost one. But this year they've swarmed five times... now we're trying to

blend the five hives into three. "Having them is a bit of confidence thing because my husband has had a bit of experience with them. It's something to do by myself. It's quite nice and I'm out there and there's no noise because we are at the end of a road."

Back at Chaos, 12 staff - mostly full-timers, many of them long-timers - keep the place ticking over. Everything is made from scratch, apart from the breads and the sweet macaroons.

Kerry chefs two days a week, and staffs the counter on a Friday.

She usually has two days off - although does paperwork at home. She's trying to ease back, saying she wants to do more of "the PR", the chatting to customers and helping when staff need her.

She's not ruling out another venture one of these days. In the meantime a large, successful cafe spins her wheels.

"I know it sounds egotistical. I keep striving to keep a little bit ahead all the time. I go to cafes all over the North Island and our food is astronomical for what we do."



Hot and tasty: Spicy chicken kumara enchilada.

Gift swap for coffee back on the menu

Last year Vosseler teamed up with Deant Jamie Allen for a new initiative at the Taranaki Cathedral Church of St Mary. People brought gifts into the New Plymouth central city church on Boxing Day - unwanted or not - and received a free coffee from Chaos.

She's back on board with the Dean this year. Gifts can be donated from now onwards.

"I've thought for a long time that Christmas is losing the reason for why it's Christmas. It's all about us opening our pockets and I think it's nice if we can give something back."

Last year many people didn't even take up the free coffee of-

fer. "It was nice to have the offer, but they were just pleased to give something out of the goodness of their heart."

Allen says last Boxing Day the Cathedral was overwhelmed by the experience.

"Those gifts, of all varieties, unnamed in source, made a deep impact in some people's hope."

This year people are also invited to offer a 'gift of time' in an envelope.

"An offer of help or support might be just the gift that's needed. I am excited to see what this opportunity will bring this year for those most in need in our community."

Baked Salmon

Can be prepared the day before and held in the fridge then cooked on the day. This is great for dinner parties.

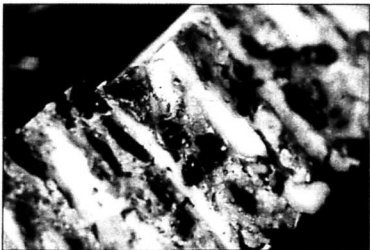
INGREDIENTS

- Side of salmon - 200g per person or 100g if serving with other meats
- Basil or tomato pesto
- Red onion
- Tomato
- Lemon juice
- Salt
- Black pepper & salt
- Parsley

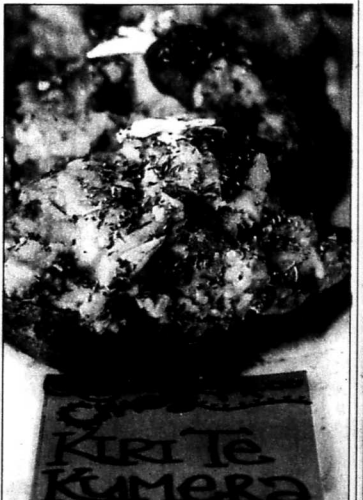
Spread salmon with basil or sundried tomato pesto mixed with thinly sliced red onion. Scatter over tomato wedges, squeeze over lemon juice and add lots of black pepper, salt and parsley.

Preheat the oven to 200 degrees Celsius and bake the salmon for 15-25 minutes. (Depending on how well done you like it - after 15 minutes it's still opaque, after 25 mins it's cooked through.)

Place the side of salmon on a sheet of baking paper then on a double layer of foil and bake uncovered in the oven.



Sweet treat: Monaco slice.



What's a name: Chaos cafe's cabinet food: Spot the quirky names like the Kiri Ie Kumara dish. Other witty titles include a Mile High gluten free brownie or a Paradise Found chocolate slice.

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