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SPARGEL ON 9

Easily Earns a 10... While Honoring Roots Generations Old

WRITTEN BY **THERESA ST. JOHN** | PHOTOS BY **SUSAN BLACKBURN PHOTOGRAPHY**





You know how, sometimes, you can walk into a place and instantly feel at home? That's how it was for me, Susan and Chris, when we opened the doors and stepped into **Spargel on 9,** located in Queensbury, NY. Tripp, the friendly gentleman at the front desk, greeted us warmly and led us to our table in the open-air restaurant, which seats 230 people and is staffed by 30 part-time and full-time employees.

"Naming the Restaurant was harder than I thought," Christian Raeth, owner of Spargel on 9, tells us, smiling. "It would've been easier to call it something like 'Queensbury Brauhaus' or 'Old Munich '- but those names would have put the restaurant in a box, one that I didn't want to be in." Christian explained that he didn't want to be known as just another German 'heavy gravy place' with tons of Beer steins and cuckoo clocks arranged on the wall. "There's so much more to Spargel," he continued. "We are truly trying to touch all of Germany's culinary spectrum."

Spargel means asparagus in German, and people there love the vegetable.

"It has a short growing season – from mid-April to around Father's Day," he shared. "Listen, apples might mark the autumn season, but there's nothing like the treasured white stalks of asparagus in the spring!"

While sipping on their chilled Raspberry Spritz cocktail, (made with Schladerer Raspberry Liquor, Prosecco, club soda, and mint), envisioning a sunny 85 degree day by a pool, and thinking - it doesn't get any better than this. A tray of glistening amber glasses of foamy beer appeared and the beer was… fabulous! Recognized for the traditional Bavarian styles and world-renowned for its Oktoberfest beers, Paulaner, founded in 1684, brews all beers according to the Bavarian purity laws from, get this – the year 1516! We tried the Müchner Gold, a rich, golden-colored lager with hints of nectarine and raisin. Here at Spargel, they serve six amazing Paulaner beers. (Which means we'll have to come back and try more!) Just when we thought it couldn't get any better, we tried the accompanying appetizer – a Bavarian pretzel stick, with a beer-cheese dip and hot honey drizzle (oh my!!).

"Respecting the dignity of a spectacular food means enjoying it at its best. Europeans celebrate the short season of abundant asparagus as a form of holiday. In the Netherlands, the first cutting coincides with Father's Day, on which restaurants may feature all–asparagus menus and hand out neckties decorated with asparagus spears."
– BARBARA KINGSOLVER





Now onto the appetizers… Cream of yellow Chantrelle mushroom soup – made bowl by bowl. The flavor was a delicate balance of earthiness and nuttiness, sometimes with a slight hint of fruity apricot.

"Yellow Chantarelles have to be foraged; they cannot be 'greenhouse' grown and are actually part of the tree's root system," Christian said. "This week, they came from a specialty vendor from Lithuania. We've gotten them from Ukraine as well. Yellow Chantarelles are a next-level mushroom that deserve all the respect we can give. That's why we make it to order. I believe cooking is like a relationship. You put good things in, and good things will come out of it." We couldn't agree more.

Next were mussels in Riesling wine broth. The stainless-steel pot came to the table piping hot, steam rolling up and out from under the lid, with the freshest mussels packed with flavor from the wine, root vegetables, and herbs they were cooked in. Each morsel was mild, tender, and full of that 'sea flavor' I always look for.

Their Backers Mit Apfel Sauce boasted three perfectly crisped potato pancakes with a side of applesauce – every bite reminded me of home - family tradition, and laughter around the tables where I ate dinners like this growing up. German food is hearty and the best in comfort food – I think so, anyway. I could almost hear my great-grandmother saying "Guten Appetit!" and smiling at all of us around her table. Chris, Susan, and I chatted, taking our time with each dish and catching up on grandbabies, new moves, and more travel.

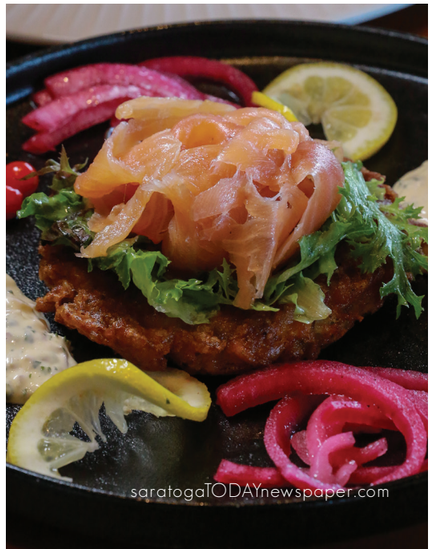


I'd never tried herring before. When Christian brought his "Hausfrauen Art" to the table, its presentation was so pretty it made our mouths water. "What is this?" we asked in unison, and Christian laughed. "It's our pickled herring topped with an apple, onion, and sour cream sauce." We loved the dish – it was mild and slightly salty, and the herring's texture was soft and tender. The cream sauce was delightfully light and added a unique note to the overall taste. (Can I tell you that every dish was so beautiful, Susan had fun photographing them all?)

While we were there eating this fantastic food, we all noticed how the staff helped each other handle the tables, bringing food out if they had a free moment, or clearing tables if they noticed a guest had finished their appetizer, entrée, or dessert, even if it wasn't in their assigned area. When Susan asked Christian about his staff and how close they seemed, he agreed. "I'm happy to say we're a very tight-knit group of crazy and professional people. I'm truly fortunate to have such an amazing staff – they step up to any task when needed without being asked. At the end of the day, they're the ones who make this restaurant the success that it is."







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We learned he was an apprentice at one time in his career. "My apprenticeship lasted 3 years; it felt more like 10 to me." He grinned. "From 1984 to 1987, I had the pleasure of working for one of the best restaurants in my hometown. Many things have changed in the industry since then, but I clearly recall taking home a whopping $200 per month in my first year, $250 the second year, and $350 in the 3rd for working 60-hour weeks." YIKES…Talk about dedication to learning from the best! "And indeed, I learned a ton, but not just about cooking. My whole attitude towards my profession and the will to keep going until the work is finished- those roots were deeply planted over those three years, building the foundation on which I still stand to this day."

Being voted "Best Overall Restaurant" by the *Post Star* was a huge honor for the team – especially since they are a niche restaurant and haven't even been open three years yet. "The ideas, procedures, and focus for Spargel are ours, yes, but without the right team, none of this would be possible." I looked over at Chris and Susan, who were enjoying every word Christian said.

"My wife Courtney is my Rock." He says with a grin. "None of this would be possible if not for her. She keeps so many things off my back and mind, letting me concentrate on the green beans." We couldn't help but laugh at that. "She works in the Health Insurance business but usually stops every night to offer support. I believe she got bitten by the restaurant bug and truly enjoys the hustle and bustle of the industry. We met the only place two super busy, devoted professionals can meet – Online."

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The Rabbit Loin 'Spargel' was boneless rabbit stuffed with asparagus and wrapped in a ribbon of crispy applewood smoked bacon. Each medallion was pan-seared and served atop potato gnocchi pasta drenched in a creamy gorgonzola sauce, with tender peppers and tasty spring onions. It did taste similar to other white meats, but a little sweeter and with a firmer, leaner texture. I'd never had that before and thought it was wonderful.

My favorite dish was the Erlanger Sauerbraten – marinated for one week in a special brine of red wine and vinegar. It's slow-roasted and topped with a sweet-sour sauce, served with potato dumplings and savory red cabbage my family would be proud to serve.

The desserts we tried were Black Forest Cake, a trio of dark, white, and nougat mousse, and their Vienna-style apple strudel, loaded with apples, with a side of vanilla ice cream and warm vanilla sauce. All three desserts were fresh and light, and each bite tasted like heaven.

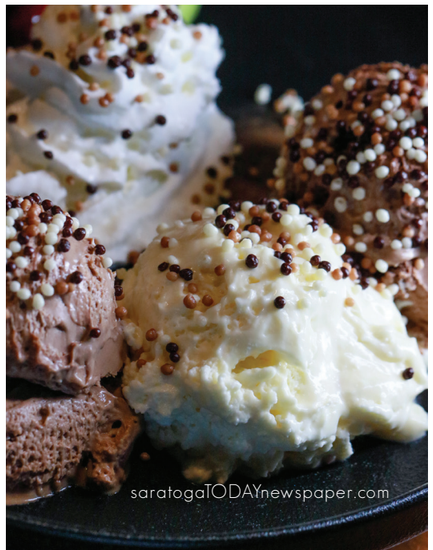
Our last question to Christian was what his favorite dish was. His laugh came from the belly. "That's the easiest one you've asked," he said. "I'm the one who created the menu – I love everything on it!"

➡ Their events sound wonderful, and we all marked our calendars!

They host two **"Halfway to October Fest"** events with live music and two **"October Fests"** in September. Check out their website (Spargelon9.com) for more information about the restaurant, its extensive menu and their schedule…see you at Spargel!







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