



BY DIANNA STAMPFLER | PHOTOGRAPHY BY CORBENE KREISER

Fine dining on Walloon

WALLOON LAKE INN

4178 West St.
Walloon Lake, MI 49796
(231) 535-2999
walloonlakeinn.com

Hours: Thursday-Sunday 5-9 p.m. during the winter season

Offers: Live music, including local pianists and guitarists, is offered in the lounge area at least two nights a week to provide a unique level of ambiance.

Just as the last autumn leaves blow away and the snow begins to fall, life on Walloon Lake slows to a comforting pace as the new season settles in. Winter is something magical in this part of northern Michigan, a charming wonderland retreat reminiscent of a storybook romance come to life.

In the heart of the village, Walloon Lake Inn is steeped in nostalgia aptly blended with modern décor and cuisine prepared by chef Mike DeMarco. Originally from Long Island, New York, and educated at the Art Institute of Fort Lauderdale, DeMarco has proven his abilities throughout the region working at Boyne USA resorts and at the award-winning Sage restaurant in Petoskey. This will be his first winter at Walloon Lake Inn.

"We are hoping to create a destination

restaurant even during the winter months," DeMarco said about the 62-seat establishment that faces the east end of Walloon Lake, just a short walk from the award-winning Hotel Walloon. "We'll be offering a 3-for-\$50 special, which will include a salad or appetizer, entrée and dessert from our scratch menu, which we think will be very popular."

Sourcing as much as possible locally, DeMarco plans to find inspiration from the produce that is available during the cold-weather months from nearby Bear Creek Organic Farms and other growers. That means hearty dishes made with potatoes, squash, Brussels sprouts, cranberries and apples, as well as wild game like venison.

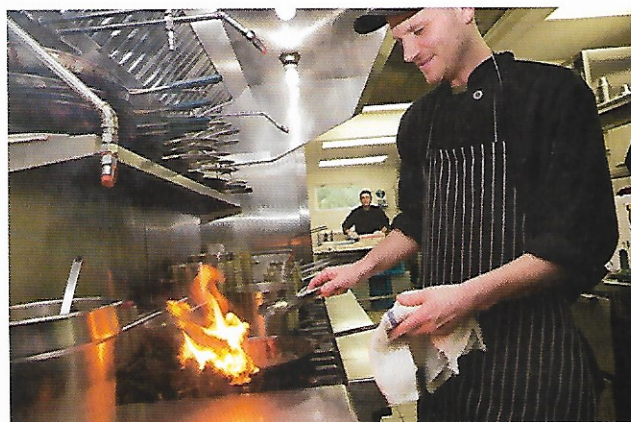
"We'll give it (venison) a try and see how well it goes over," said DeMarco, who proud-

Opposite page: The bar and piano lounge is a cozy area that leads to the dining room beyond.

Right: The historic Inn first opened in 1891. **Below and right:** Chef Mike DeMarco prepares one of the inn's specialties, filet with beet risotto and broccoli and carrot demi.



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ly makes his own sauces and stocks, the rich, flavorful liquids for the braised dishes and comfort foods that he's planning to serve. Other winter dishes include favorites like lamb chops, squash bisque and apple pie.

As she looks forward to the changing season, manager Melissa Ogden is confident in DeMarco's skills to keep Walloon Lake Inn a popular spot for locals and visitors alike. "He has the best can-do attitude around and is eager to give our guests exactly what they're looking for. We're fortunate to have him leading our team."

Opened as Fern Cottage by Clayton Bixby in 1891, this quaint country inn served as a docking point for the steamboats that would transport the summer people to their cottages or hotels around the lake. Guests at the inn

paid \$2 per day (with special rates for the full week) and were given private rooms, access to indoor bathrooms and a large dining room to take their meals.

The establishment was sold to Mrs. Gorman Trixler in 1948, becoming Silver Birch Inn with its "Colonial Dining Room" specializing in group dinners and serving shrimp and freshwater fish every Friday night. Several other owners took the helm during the next three-plus decades before chef David Beier purchased the property in 1981, renaming it Walloon Lake Inn. He continued to operate it as a bed-and-breakfast and restaurant, offering "dining and cocktails in an atmosphere of scenic charm."

In 2014, the intimate inn was sold to Matt Borisch who invested time and money to

remodel the restaurant and lounge into the upscale eatery it is today. Guests continue to dine on timeless dishes, as well as regionally inspired items in the open dining room, with its large windows overlooking the historic Walloon Lake. The cozy lounge area features an eight-seat curved bar, seating area with leather chairs, couches and a baby grand piano where, if you're lucky, YoungMin You will be tickling the ivories.

Dianna Stampfler is a freelance writer and president of Promote Michigan. She lives in Walloon Lake.