

Harboring High-End Comfort Food

Story & Photo by Rob Lane

Chris Hascall was working in the kitchen at Sunday River Ski Resort in Bethel, Maine, when the phone rang and the voice on the other end asked, "Chris, have you ever been to Watkins Glen?" The voice was that of the director of operations at Hart Hotels, who had been trying to track Hascall down in Maine for a month. Chris flew down to Watkins Glen and, in his words, "The area was just gorgeous." As their new executive chef, he became the first employee hired for the new Watkins Glen Harbor Hotel.

Hascall's experience makes him well-qualified to lead the culinary team at Watkins Glen's new luxury hotel. After culinary school at the University of Southern Maine, his next fourteen years included stints at the acclaimed Fore Street restaurant in Portland, Maine, and experience at several Four-Diamond properties, including the Harraseeket Inn and the Portland Harbor Hotel. In 2004 he finally realized his dream of opening his own restaurant, The Victoria Restaurant, which he leased for several years from the historic Victoria Bed & Breakfast in Bethel, Maine. Hascall calls his time there a phenomenal experience, where he enjoyed having the freedom to develop his own style—and gained the notice that attracted the Harbor Hotel.

The thirty-six-year-old describes the dining experience at Watkins Glen Harbor Hotel as "high-end comfort food." Chris oversees food preparation for the eighty-seat Blue-

Point Grille, with its understated elegance, the comfortable thirty-seat Coldwater Bar, which has additional seating for one hundred on the Patio overlooking beautiful Seneca Harbor, and all banquet facilities. The chef states, "Utilizing local ingredients is very important to me," and he procures as much as he can from local sources. He also says that he will be taking full advantage of the nearby Finger Lakes wineries by using local wines in everything from "soups to desserts." He freely admits that he is a perfectionist and demands top effort from his staff.

In addition to daily specials, the lunch menu is priced at \$12 and under, and dinner entrees range in price from \$21 to \$36. They include Tuscan chicken, pan-fried double chicken breasts with fresh spinach, artichoke hearts, and baby portobello mushrooms over couscous with a lemon caper sauce for \$22; pork tenderloin wrapped with prosciutto, stuffed with spinach and goat cheese, and topped with a rosemary bourbon glaze, served with sweet mashed potatoes for \$24; and rack of lamb drizzled with pistachio pesto mint cream sauce, served with roasted garlic mashed potatoes for \$30.



Hascall, who now resides in Ithaca, relates that it has been a whirlwind getting the hotel ready, but he says the community reaction has been "inspiring." With a full house of customers enjoying the menu selections on the day I visited, it appears that the reverse is also true—Chris Hascall is inspiring the Watkins Glen community.

Rob Lane writes a Finger Lakes wine blog, www.fingerlakesweekendwino.blogspot.com. Contact him at robl@mountainhomemag.com.

Chris Hascall's Stuffed Pork Tenderloin with Port Wine Sauce

- 2 14–16 oz. pork tenderloins
- 4 oz. prosciutto ham, sliced thin
- 4 oz. brie cheese, rind removed, cut into small pieces
- 1 tsp. fresh thyme leaves, chopped
- 1/2 c. panko breadcrumbs
- 1/2 medium yellow onion, chopped
- 2 tsp. garlic, chopped
- 2 tsp. shallot, chopped
- 2 Tbsp. vegetable or olive oil
- 1 pinch each salt and pepper
- 1/2 bottle port wine
- 1 1/2 c. low sodium chicken broth
- 4 Tbsp. unsalted butter
- Preheat oven to 400°F

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