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today

DRAFT PICKS

John Holl's weekly column

appears on Wednesdays.

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HORTICULTURAL THERAPY



PHOTO COURTESY OF LAURA DEPRADO

Elders created November Garden Harvest in a vase using lavender, thyme, yellow mums, ornamental peppers and leaf stems of a dwarf Japanese maple tree and a scarecrow.

Meaning of connecting with plants for elders



LAURA DE PRADO
HORTICULTURAL
THERAPY

In June I became part of a treatment team facilitating horticultural therapy activity sessions for elders in long-term care at Abingdon Care and Rehabilitation Center in Green Brook.

Abingdon provides a range of post-hospital and long-term transition services including surgical recovery, physical, occupational and speech therapies, stroke recovery and hospice/end-of-life care. Abingdon is part of Windsor Healthcare Communities serving Somerset, Middlesex, Union, Essex, Passaic and Bergen counties.

Horticultural therapy works by creating interactions between plants and people, typically in a garden or greenhouse. Abingdon's horticultural activities take place twice a month in the main gathering room on the second floor. The group of 11 to 17 participants (known as elders), ranges in age from 70s to 90s, male and female, physically impaired with mild to moderate cognitive impairments.

Evidence-based research shows that horticultural therapy offers an opportunity for quiet reflection while simultaneously providing a task to occupy the patient's thoughts. This, quite often, releases the mind from obsessive thoughts about the person's physical or emotional ailments.

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KASHMIRI CUISIN

BIG LEAP OF (FOOD) FAITH



The newly opened Café Vaaza, which serves Kashmiri food in Metuchen.

ED PAGLIARINI/CORRESPONDENT

Café Vaaza invites patrons to immerse palates in the exotic flavors of Wazwan

MICHELLE H. DAINO
CORRESPONDENT

The flavors are alluring and the preparation is labor-intensive. In fact, the cuisine known as Wazwan, which is derived from Kashmir, from the very north of the Indian sub-continent, is so rarely showcased in the area, that a new restaurant in Metuchen has literally cornered the market in serving it up.

"I belong to a Kashmiri family," explained Moonis Meer, who officially opened his restaurant, Café Vaaza, on Main Street in Metuchen on Oct. 16, with a "soft" opening on Aug. 9.

"I grew up with this unique and flavorful Kashmiri cuisine, which is totally different from the usual Indian cuisine," he said, claiming that there is not a single restaurant of its kind in the United States to his knowledge.

"It was my passion for cooking that encouraged me to learn to cook Wazwan," Meer added.

It was an incredible leap of faith that brought Meer to resign in June 2014 from his job as a financial controller with an investment management company in Manhattan for 17 years in order to pursue his dream of exposing this unique cuisine through Café Vaaza.

"I always had this passion and enjoyed cooking because I found it relaxing and therapeutic," he said. "I felt strongly that it was important to learn how to cook the Kashmiri cuisine."

"Yes, it was a leap of faith, a bold step to start the restaurant and leave my job, but my wife encouraged me and I didn't want to have any regrets that it is what I should have done but didn't do," he noted.

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At a glance

Lunch at Café Vaaza is served from noon to 3 p.m., followed by dinner from 5 to 10 p.m. The restaurant is closed on Mondays. For more information about Café Vaaza, at 419 Main St. in Metuchen, visit www.cafevaaza.com, call 732-710-5599 or email cafe@cafevaaza.com.



ED PAGLIARINI/CORRESPONDENT

Chicken Kebabs are among the 28 authentic Kashmiri dishes served at Café Vaaza.

YOUR TUESDAY TICKET TO TRAVEL

Meet the neighbors of New Orleans



LIFE ABOARD
THE TRAVELING
CIRCUS



JENNA INTERSIMONE
LIFE ABOARD THE
TRAVELING CIRCUS

New Orleans, Louisiana, is full of so much twisted personality of its inhabitants that it's difficult to fit them within the city's 350 square miles. I got a taste of this when I visited the jazzy city two years ago, but in spending my time going to crowded tourist attractions, I did not get the full effect of the crazy that's swirling around this rogue destination of the south.

This time, I planned a trip with a friend who lives in the area. Being one constantly on the hunt for new destinations, I was hesitant to visit a place that I had already been. What I didn't anticipate was that my travel companion provided a new angle of travel that I didn't usually get to enjoy — that of a resident, bringing me a tour of the people, not just the city.

It's these local characters that make the city different every round. This time around, my tour was focused on them.

The French Quarter, founded in 1718, is the cultural and historic center of New Orleans. It contains famous spots such as Bourbon Street, the St. Louis Cathedral and Café du Monde.

However, the Quarter isn't all tourists. At its center, Jackson Square, local artists and entertainers scatter their tables along the iron fencing. We met Chilly and his dachshund Maximus, a recently relocated pair who hung out at the Square to meet new neighbors. Chilly, reminiscent of a street comic, would chat with any friendly passer-by, evaporating the notion that those at the Square were tourist-hungry peddlers.

The Garden District, a New Orleans neighborhood known for its collection of historical southern mansions painted in pastels, is commonly seen as a tourist destination due to the opulence of the homes as well as their residence by notable people such as Peyton Manning,

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JENNA INTERSIMONE/STAFF PHOTO

Jackson Square is made up of many of the city's artists and entertainers.