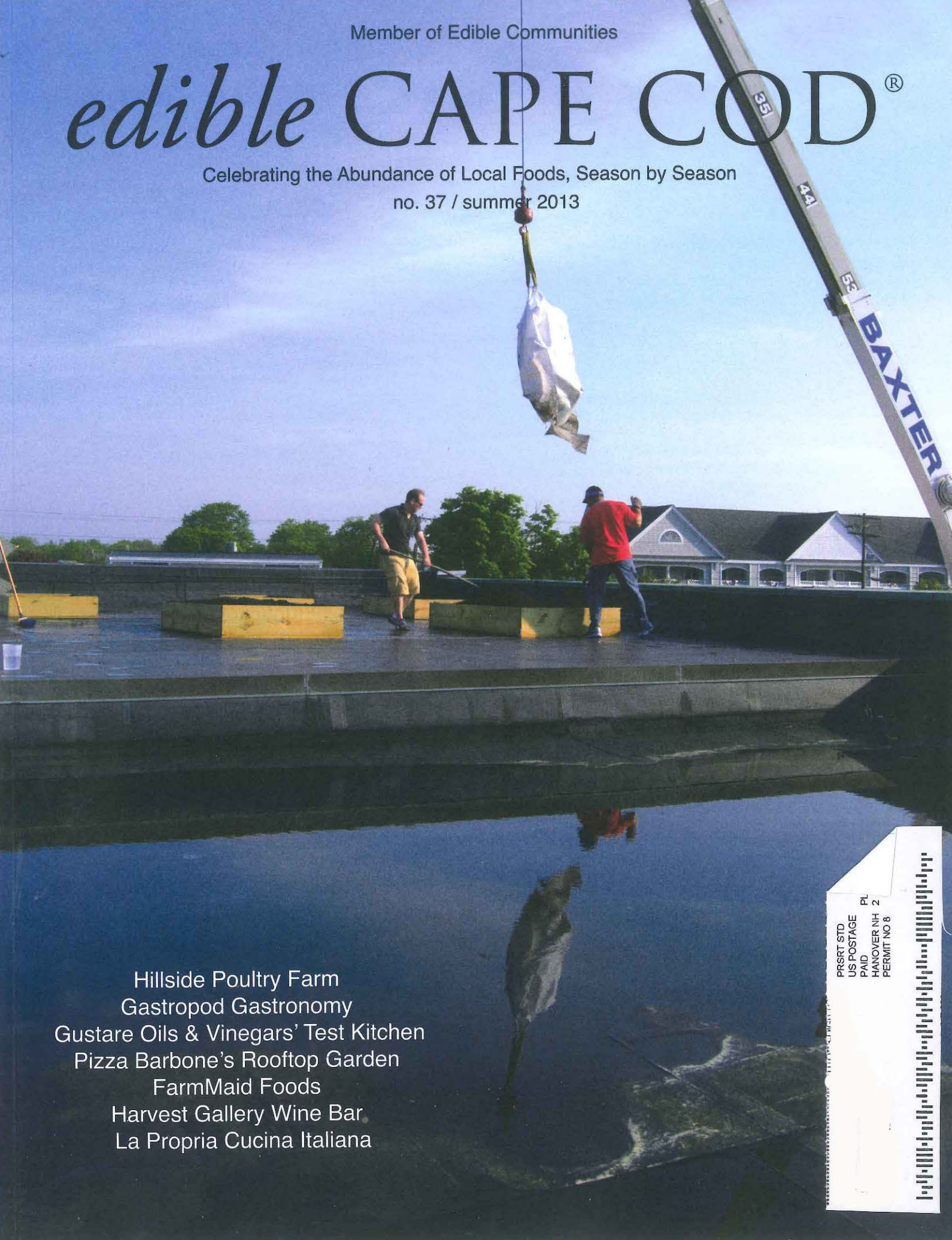


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Hearth 'n Kettle Turns 40

In 1973, Carly Simon's *You're So Vain* was at the top of the charts, *The Godfather* won best film Oscar and VJ Catania transformed a Pewter Pot Muffin House in Falmouth (his previous restaurant concept) into the first Hearth 'n Kettle Restaurant. Five more Hearth 'n Kettles followed as the Catania Hospitality Group grew. From 1975 to 2000, Hearth 'n Kettles opened in Hyannis, Yarmouth, Orleans, Plymouth, Weymouth and South Attleboro, all under the Catania umbrella.

Forty years is a huge milestone for the Cape's coziest casual dining place, especially among the sometimes rapid turnover seen on the local restaurant scene. One secret to its longevity is clearly an ability to keep up with the times. Stephen Higgins, Executive Chef and Purchasing for the Catania Hospitality Group, started as a line cook in Yarmouth in 1973. The H 'n K has been something of family experience for him, as he met his wife when she was a server in Orleans and all four of their kids have worked there. He described the original Hearth n' Kettle as open 24 hours a day and geared towards breakfast, with a huge after-bar-crowd rush and a menu featuring Sanka coffee and the Burgundy Bubbler, a red wine spritzer. There was also comfortable New England food, such as eggs, omelets, hot dogs, grilled cheese, scrod and scallop specials, and pudding pie squares for dessert. He states that in the '70s, there were no concerns about nutrition and sourcing, and that things were kept simple.

Forty years later, some things remain the same at the Hearth 'n Kettle. While the decor has been subtly updated, the general look and feel, remembered by locals and tourists alike, remains in place. The Colonial log cabin atmosphere is still evoked by the stained wooden barn board lining the walls, the big walk-in fireplaces topped with decorative muskets, and the wall murals featuring scenes of early New England. Diners who recall experiencing that atmosphere as children can count on giving their children the same sense today.

The Hearth 'n Kettle continues to welcome patrons to its traditional comforts, but within that comfort, many changes and updates have occurred. This is a case of change being truly a good thing, as it reflects consumers' ever growing demands for better, fresher, healthier food and the accommodation of special diets. As part of its 40th anniversary celebration, the Hearth 'n Kettle kicked off a new standards guideline for its products, called H 'n K Approved. It sets three criteria that must be met by their products.

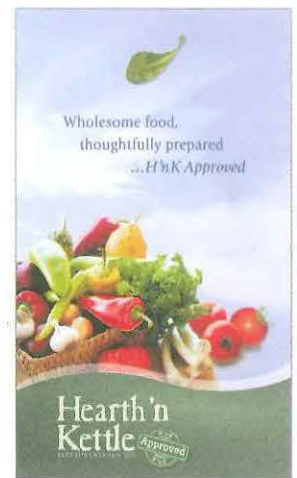
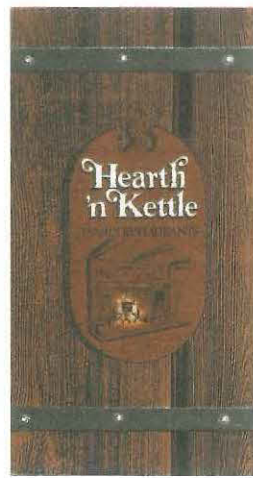
First, ingredients must be wholesome, which underlies the H 'n K commitment to making as many ingredients as possible fresh, nutritious, hormone- and antibiotic-free and free of artificial preservatives. In practice this means organic arugula and mesclun mix sourced from local company Guaranteed Fresh and Local. It means certified Angus beef free of hormones and antibiotics, equally clean chicken breasts, and local scallops. Stephen says that even the big restaurant suppliers, such as Sysco, are starting to respond to demand by offering cleaner labels, naturals and organics on a big scale. It also means making much of their food in-house from scratch, including soups, salad dressings and sauces. The H 'n K remains unique as a casual establishment able to offer this high a level of goodness.

Second, the finished product must taste great. This follows sourcing great ingredients and is exemplified in such menu updates as summer berry and apple pecan salads; calamari from Rhode Island; Cape scrod coated in Ritz cracker crumbs; and mashed butternut squash. The most popular breakfast harks back to the H 'n K's original menu emphasis: The Plantation Special is a hearty plate of eggs, bacon, sausage and home fries.

Finally, all ingredients and techniques must be competitively priced to allow the resulting menu item to be reasonably priced. Stephen Higgins cites this as his biggest challenge as purchaser for the Catania Hospitality Group. This level of sourcing is rare for a six-restaurant chain, and the competitive prices are rare for the quality of the sourcing. Stephen is always looking to improve, and constantly seeks to provide quality at a good price.

There has been one more significant change at the H 'n K, and it is perhaps the most apparent one upon entering the dining room. The uniforms have changed. The iconic Colonial dresses and mop top hats have been, like almost everything else, updated to accommodate today's taste. Current servers wear black pants and blue tops, creating a more modern feel even against the antique décor. But fear not, a mannequin can be found gracing the fireside of each restaurant in full colonial dress, ready to pose with the kids for a great 40th anniversary picture.

- Mary Blair Petiet



Hearth 'n Kettle
9 West Road, Orleans
1196 Main Street, South Yarmouth
1225 Route 132, Hyannis
www.hearthnkettle.com