



# locavores



/ˈlōkəvōrs/

*plural noun*

People whose diets consist only or principally of locally grown or produced food.



Frank's Gourmet Grille is a resident favorite

By *Jenny Quill*  
Photos by *Seth Jacobson*



There's loyal, and then there are the regulars at Frank's Gourmet Grille in Mystic, Frank's Fan Club, Frank Fanatics, Frank-ophiles—whatever you want to call them, they're a dedicated bunch.

"The atmosphere is great," says Uncasville resident Shawn Little. "Between a mix of locals, customers from East Lyme, and tourists, there's always someone to talk to. The staff is always attentive and friendly. You feel as if you're at the best neighborhood dinner party."

Helmed by chef/owner Frank Grace, the

Jacques—and its casual, come-as-you-are ambience.

Frank has been a fixture of the local dining scene for more than 20 years, having opened his first restaurant, the Broad St. Deli in New London, in 1996.

"I used to joke that my master-bedroom closet was bigger than my store," says Frank. "I could only fit two to three customers at the counter at a time. The rest had to wait outside on the sidewalk for their turn." Frank moved to a larger location on Hamilton Street to keep up with demand and, over the next seven years, Shaw's Cove Deli became the go-to New London lunch spot. It was here that Frank



ABOVE: Frank chats with patrons.  
 FAR RIGHT TOP: Samantha Storey takes an order.  
 FAR RIGHT CENTER: Friends chat at the bar.  
 FAR RIGHT BOTTOM: Frank and his sous chefs.

opening of his first upscale café in East Lyme, the original Frank's Gourmet Grille, followed a few years later by Main Street Grille in Niantic.

"From the sandwich shop to the East Lyme diner, I recognized that I had very loyal people. I still have people telling me about a sandwich they got in 1996," he laughs.

A few of those early customers were David and Sue Labrie, innkeepers at the Inn at Harbor Hill Marina in Niantic, who have visited all three of Frank's restaurants over the past 16 years.

"We appreciate how Frank takes the time to walk through his restaurant, even during the busiest of times, to meet his customers, seek feedback on their meals and thank them for visiting," says David Labrie. "It's clear to us, being in the hospitality business, that Frank understands the importance of making his customers feel welcome and appreciated."

In talking to his regulars, it becomes obvious that the main attraction at Frank's — is Frank! The loquacious, Long Island-raised chef's passion for cooking, food and people is one of the reasons, if not the reason, people keep coming back.

"Why do we keep going back? Simple ... Frank!" says longtime customer and Niantic resident Jay Samuelson. "He has become a friend, someone we want to see,

Frank will be the first to tell you that earning customers' loyalty starts with the staff, or, as he prefers to call them, "teammates."

"We would never, ever have the reputation we have without my teammates, from the kitchen to the front of the house," says Frank. "I can't say enough good things about them." And the feeling must be mutual: Of his 28 employees, eight have been with him since the East Lyme location and about five others from his days at Main Street Grille. His team is warm, hospitable and knowledgeable without being overly fussy, a tricky balance to get just right. And it hasn't gone unnoticed by guests.

"Frank's staff is always so welcoming and friendly," says Maxine DeFusco of Niantic. "That restaurant runs like a well-oiled machine."

Ultimately, a restaurant's success boils down to its food, and visitors can always expect a delicious, made-from-scratch meal at Frank's.

"Frank's offers one of the most extensive menus of any restaurant around," says Labrie. "And the food quality and preparation is always a cut above."

The menu is indeed expansive, running the gamut from American standbys, like pork tenderloin with oven-roasted applesauce, to traditional French dishes, such as escargot in garlic butter and steak au

by the popularity of his chicken marsala, creamy risotto, veal shanks osso buco, and shrimp scampi.

"Frank's scampi is unlike any you've ever had," says Samuelson. "It has a luscious garlic creaminess to it. And my wife gets the chicken marsala all the time. The sauce is perfection. Pair it with the risotto, you can't go wrong."

Given its proximity to the Connecticut coastline, seafood gets top billing. Among the catch-of-the-day fare, the grilled mussels appetizer stands out, fresh Prince Edward Island mussels swimming in white wine, garlic and shallots, topped with breadcrumbs and cheese.

"The grilled mussels are tender, buttery yumminess," says Samuelson. The lobster lump crab cakes, nightly seafood pasta special, and grilled seasonal fish are also favorites.

"I am not normally a fish person," says DeFusco, "but Frank prepares fish like no one else. Most recently, I had a barramundi that was on the specials menu. I cannot in words adequately describe how delicious it was."

When your restaurant is busy and you have a steady flow of customers singing your praises, it's easy to become complacent. But Frank is not one to rest on his laurels. On a steamy day this past July, he was at the fish market picking up the day's catch, then running to the bank, followed by a flurry of phone calls, dinner prep and service. And he can still be found making the rounds through the dining room, stopping at each and every table to inquire about guests' meals.

"The thing about Frank and the entire vibe at Frank's Gourmet Grille is the sincerity to please his customers," says Labrie. "We often wonder how he continues to stay so actively involved in the restaurant and passionate about his food and service. Whatever his drive, I know we are fans."

*Frank's Gourmet Grille is located at 56 Whitehall Ave, Stonington, CT 06355, near the heart of Mystic's foremost attractions. Call 860-415-4666 or visit*

