

## **Jenny's little farm: Grand Island restaurant owner's eggs-cellent hobby**

By Michele Deluca Niagara Gazette

NIAGARA FALLS — It seems really fun to own a rooster — until you have to chase him through your suburban neighborhood.

One Sunday morning after a scuffle with a fox on the front lawn of their Grand Island home, Jenny Benz's rooster disappeared, leaving nothing behind but a few ruffled white feathers.

The family met a some of their neighbors that day as they chased their bird through the new housing development near their East River home. Eventually, with the help of a pool net, their rooster, Pecker, was returned to his little flock.

Such is life for those who want to try a bit of suburban mini-farming which, along with the increase of chicken coops in urban centers, is rising in popularity as more citizens try to localize their food supply.

Benz, an island native and owner of the Grand Island restaurant Dick and Jenny's, raises chickens with her husband, Richard.

“The chickens started out from a perfect storm of winter boredom and Richard on the Internet,” she explained. ““Oh they're just so cute! Wouldn't they look great walking around the yard? Just think about the eggs...’ Once we got them we loved the eggs, so now we keep them.”

Raising chickens in the backyard is becoming more and more popular in cities and suburbs. Research, including that done by Mother Earth Magazine, shows that eggs produced by free range chickens have more vitamins, less cholesterol and saturated fat and taste superior to supermarket eggs.

The family, led by Jenny's enthusiasm, continues to try and utilize the old farm they have purchased. It includes a giant barn and an old ice house that is often visited when schoolchildren tour historic sites in the area.

There were horses for a while, and the family had a couple of goats last year with high hopes of producing goat cheese, but the Benz kids weren't as fond of the furry kids as Jenny had hoped, so the goats were sold to a lady in Pennsylvania.

Certainly the chickens have faired better. On a recent visit to the family's East River home, the Benz children were surrounded by a gaggle of neighborhood friends, and all were visiting the hen house where a box of baby chicks had just arrived in the mail.

The little farm's animal population ebbs and flows with family interest.

“Richard wants a cow but I've vetoed that,” said Jenny. “Nine gallons of milk a day is just a lot of milking. He says ‘Make cheese!’ I did make cream cheese when we were debating if we would go into the cheese-making business.”

The cream cheese she made by hand was delicious, she said, but so was her favorite store brand. Besides that, they found the rules for commercial cheese making were “overwhelming.”

Dick and Jenny met more than a decade ago at an upscale New Orleans bistro where Jenny was a server and Richard was a chef. After they married, they opened a restaurant called Dick and Jenny's in New Orleans, but their life was uprooted by Hurricane Katrina. The wines and seafood in their restaurant spoiled and their 1890s home was destroyed. Insurance assistance took forever to arrive.

Jenny moved back to West River Grand Island home where she grew up, so their three children could begin school. Eventually, the family opted to settle on Grand Island to begin again. Her friends and family rallied to support the family and eventually, Dick and Jenny's reopened in a former restaurant at Baseline and Love Roads.

The Benzs have since settled in an old farm house on East River Road, near Fix Road.

“When I first looked at the place, I thought, ‘Oh, Richard will never be bored here,’ ” Jenny smiled. Her husband has since planted a variety of fruit trees, a garden, and “dozens and dozens” of grapevines,” she said.

The pair also share duties at Dick and Jenny's, which opened in 2008 serving just breakfast and lunch but which when dinners were added, has since grown into a popular dinner location. The restaurant — where tables are sometimes hard to come by on Saturday nights — features offerings with a New Orleans flair such as southern barbecued shrimp and sweet potato grits along with traditional favorites. New dishes coming soon, Jenny said, include: bronzed pork tenderloin stuffed with goat cheese, pine nuts and basil over Louisiana jambalaya and pecan crusted yellow pike with Creole meuniere sauce and crab. The restaurant also features an ever-changing wine collection handpicked by Jenny.

While the restaurant cannot use the eggs laid in the Benz hen house, Jenny said her family and friends enjoy the fresh eggs provided by her small brood of Plymoth Rock hens. They are worth the trouble of an occasional chase through the neighborhood for the rooster.

“The chickens are pretty low maintenance,” she said. “You really don't have to do anything. They forage for food. You just have to remember to shut the door so the fox doesn't eat them.”

FYI for those considering hens or roosters: Check your community guidelines and consider that eggs will not hatch without the benefit of a rooster.

Either way, the fresh eggs are said by many to be really delicious and can be used fairly safely, without worry of the salmonella sometimes found in commercial eggs.

When asked for a recipe to share for the Chef's Choice column, the Benz's offered two, including an egg bake which is on the breakfast menu at the restaurant.

### Creole Deviled Eggs

12 hard boiled eggs, peeled, split in half with yolks separated

2 tablespoons Zatarain's Creole Mustard

1/2 cup mayonnaise

6 shakes Tabasco

pinch of salt

paprika for dusting

In a food processor, using the steel blade, combine yolks, Creole mustard, mayo, Tabasco and salt and puree until smooth. Put mix in piping bag and fill whites. Dust with paprika and chill.

Here is an egg bake recipe from the restaurant, Dick and Jenny's, 1270 Baseline Road on Grand Island serves breakfasts, lunches and dinners, Tuesday through Saturday.

### East River Iron Skillet Egg Bake

5 slices bacon, chopped

6 patties sausage, chopped

1/3 cup ham, chopped

1 1/2 cups day old bread, cubed

10 large eggs

1/3 cup milk

fresh ground pepper

1 1/2 cups shredded cheddar cheese

Preheat oven to 350. In a 9" or 10" cast iron skillet over medium heat sauté bacon and sausage until browned. Drain excess grease. Return to heat. Add ham and bread and stir to combine. In a small bowl whisk eggs and milk and pepper to taste. Pour egg mixture in skillet. Top with cheddar cheese. Bake 15 to 20 minutes until set in the middle. Let rest 10 minutes before slicing into wedges.