

## EATING OUT

# The Table: Fresh pasta, community style

by Marie Biondolillo

Every week for the past two years, Bellingham Pasta Company co-owner Anna Rankin has delivered 200 pounds of fresh pasta by bicycle. Rankin, who also co-owns Bellingham Pasta Company's new restaurant The Table, uses a lightweight trailer to carry her goods to locations ranging from the Fountain District to Fairhaven Haggen.

"It saves the company a lot of money," said Rankin. "But I also want to show people that you can go to and from work without a car, and even use your bike for work."

This sort of commitment to environmentally sustainable yet pragmatic practices seems to define the philosophy behind Bellingham Pasta Company and The Table.

"We always say that it needs to be as local and fresh as possible, using thoughtfully procured ingredients," said Nikki Williamson, one of The Table's co-owners. "But we also want our food to be affordable."

Rankin started Bellingham Pasta Company with Katie Hinton in October 2008, renting a kitchen space from Ken Bothman, co-owner of La Fiamma Wood Fire Pizza.

"We started just in time for Thanksgiving, selling our pasta to restaurants and caterers, as well as selling directly to customers at the Farmer's Market," said Hinton.

The business quickly took off, and Bellingham Pasta Company soon had accounts with a number of local restaurants and retailers.

"We had people

approaching us, saying, 'This is the best fresh pasta I've ever had,'" said Rankin. "I really think that because we use a heavier end of egg content than most – and use organic brown eggs – that it makes a big difference in the pasta's flavor."

As their business became more successful, Hinton and Rankin considered expanding into a full-time operation. In February 2010, they secured the Commercial Street space formerly home to the Pacific Café.

"Initially, we just wanted to be able to expand our product line, but then we saw that the space would work well for a restaurant as well," said Rankin.

Hinton and Rankin brought on two partners for The Table – Williamson, whom Rankin had worked with previously, and Hinton's husband Steve. After personally renovating the space and bringing on an executive chef, Dave Reera, they opened The Table in late July.

"At first, we wanted to go real casual – a counter-service restaurant that offered food to go," said Williamson. "But once we put together the menu, the food exceeded our original expectations in terms of style and presentation."

The decision was made to go full-service. The partners stocked the space with tables they found at the ReStore, and refurbished a long "community" table that stretches the length of the dining room.

"Anna and I had always wanted a communal table, and we thought this was a



Diners at The Table sit at the long, refurbished community table that spans the length of the restaurant's seating area. The restaurant, located in downtown Bellingham, opened last summer and features fresh made pasta dishes, using mostly local ingredients from Whatcom and Skagit counties. PHOTO BY HOLLIE HUTHMAN

great space for doing that," said Hinton. "We visualized [Mount Baker] theater-goers being able to sit down and talk about the shows they had just seen, or were about to see."

They also worked hard at designing a menu that could offer delicious, affordable food made from as many local ingredients as possible.

"Most of our ingredients come from Skagit and Whatcom County," said Williamson. "It wouldn't make sense to start a restaurant in Bellingham and not buy our supplies from community members, many of whom have bought pasta from us."

The owners collaborate with Reera to execute their ideas cost-effectively – a challenge when trying to keep menu prices family-friendly.

"It takes extra energy to locally source ingredients, but Dave is very dedicated. He meets with farmers at

the Farmer's Market [when in season], and goes down to Skagit frequently," said Hinton. "In fact, he'd like to hear from farmers more often."

As always, cooking locally means cooking seasonally. This requires The Table to change its menu every four weeks.

"We just rotated in a shiitake mushroom alfredo," said Hinton. "We've also got chicken and vegetable pot pies."

The Table's commitment to local and regional ingredients extends to their beverage menu.

"We serve beer and wine from Washington and Oregon exclusively," said Williamson. "We switch out our beer and wines regularly. We prefer biodynamic growers who try to work with the environment."

The Table's non-alcoholic beverages are also sourced

locally. Their drink menu includes offerings from Seattle's Dry Soda, Skagit Country's Sakuma Sparkling Beverages, Spice Hut and Bellingham Bay Coffee Roasters.

As The Table evolves, the partners are adding more options to their menu, as well as doing more retailing, catering and special events.

"On Thursdays we have a ravioli night – we offer three or four types of ravioli, and five or so kinds of sauces, and people can mix and match," said Williamson. "We want to expand to different farmer's markets, and we've talked about doing differently themed food nights, maybe with wine pairings."

*The Table is located at 100 N Commercial St. in Bellingham and can be reached at (360) 594-6000.*