

## Putting the Farm on The Table

By Shawna Leader  
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The first thing diners may notice when entering The Table, located downtown on Commercial Street, is there is room for everyone.



Anna Rankin, co-owner of The Table, prepares a special order of linguini Wednesday, Sept. 22, for Chuckanut Brewery and the Bellingham Farmers Market. // photo by Jaynie Hancock // THE WESTERN FRONT

From intimate two-seaters to a long communal table dividing the restaurant in half, The Table seems to welcome groups of all sizes.

The connection between food and community is never far from thought at The Table. The restaurant, which opened this past July, caters to many tastes by providing a welcoming, laid-back atmosphere and basic meals.

Guided by a farm-to-table philosophy, the food served at The Table is made using locally sourced ingredients.

Co-owner Katie Hinton said the restaurant is meant to provide a place for members of the community to gather. Her vision includes not only customers, but providers and vendors as well.

“We’re giving back to the community by using farmers that are local,” Hinton said.

Ingredients include meat, bread and produce, which come from local vendors and farms, such as Twisted S Ranch of Ferndale, and Joe's Gardens and Avenue Bread of Bellingham. All wine and beer sold at the restaurant come from the Pacific Northwest.

The pastas on The Table's menu are made in the restaurant's kitchen with flours from Fairhaven Flour Mill and Pendleton Flour Mill and eggs from Sedro-Woolley. The uncooked pastas for sale in the restaurant are made with the same ingredients.

"There's really such a huge difference with the taste and the texture [of fresh pasta]," co-owner Anna Rankin said.

Making pasta in-house also saves on costs, she said.

Although purchasing ingredients from farther away would save the restaurant money, the owners of The Table will not sacrifice quality for price, Rankin said.

"We live in a region that's full of amazing wine, amazing beer, amazing produce," Rankin said. "We have no reason to go to California or Mexico."

Hinton and Rankin, who are accompanied by co-owners Steve Hinton and Nikki Williamson, grew up in Portland, Ore., where they had access to fresh-made pasta.

In Bellingham, they filled the need for fresh pasta by creating Bellingham Pasta Co. in 2008.

Although many Bellingham restaurants use locally sourced ingredients, a commitment to reducing their carbon footprint and investing in the community sets them apart.

For example, Rankin delivers half of the pasta orders to restaurants and vendors by bicycle, even in the winter, to reduce the use of fossil fuels.

The menu consists of standard pasta entrees, salads, sandwiches and a few appetizers. Most appetizers are priced the same as a small entree.

While mainstays such as spaghetti and meatballs are always available, parts of the menu change every five to six weeks to accommodate seasonal ingredients.

The Table will soon offer more dishes containing root vegetables and mushrooms, as well as pumpkin and other types of squash. Weekly seasonal dishes are also featured on the menu.

The dishes served at The Table are what Williamson, a 2007 Western graduate, called "comfort food with a twist."

"We definitely wanted food that was approachable, not intimidating," Williamson said.

The idea is to appeal to various types of people by keeping dishes simple.

The Table has received positive business since it opened, and although summer is not considered the most opportune time to open, the restaurant's success has exceeded expectations, Rankin said. Word of mouth has drawn many customers and sometimes the food promotes itself.

"We knew they made their own pasta and they were selling it locally," Margaret Lind, a customer at The Table, said of what drew her to the restaurant.

Even in the current economy, high quality food still attracts customers.

"People want to treat themselves well, even during these hard times." Hinton said. "They want to make sure that it's the best experience they can have at that price."

Art is another way community members get involved with The Table.

Like the menu, the art adorning the restaurant's walls rotates on a regular basis and is often selected based on seasonal fit.

Local artists, Western students included, are invited to contribute their works. A recent display featured prints by Western alumna Lindsay Kohles.

In the future, the owners of The Table are looking to expand the selection of pastas for sale at the restaurant and start catering and selling pasta at farmers markets other than the ones in Bellingham, Williamson said.

A recent customer commented on seeing a wide demographic in the restaurant, from couples on dates, to college students and families, Rankin said.

"I think it appeals to everyone who is interested in fresh quality food," Rankin said.

A review of a few dishes

Pan-fried ravioli (\$9) arrives covered in a rich sauce of browned butter, hazelnuts, olive oil and balsamic vinegar. The crunchy and chewy texture of the ravioli makes eating more work than it should be.

The macaroni and cheese (\$6) downplays the cheese so attention can be focused on the pasta, which turns out to be so soft it absorbs the cheese and maximizes the flavors. By itself it is not a whole meal, but would be great with a salad.

Spaghetti and meatballs (\$8 small, \$15 large) does not try to mess with a classic; it is a dish for someone who craves the familiar. The pork and bison meatball (despite the

dish's name, it comes with just one large meatball) is a refreshing difference without deviating from traditional ground beef.

The real standout, though, is the pink vodka penne (\$8/\$11). A careful balance of subtle flavors—tomato, cream, pecorino Romano cheese and basil—allows each ingredient to be present without overwhelming the others. It is mild, but flavorful. It is comfort food gone gourmet.