Life is too short to settle for ordinary.
Piping hot and cleverer-than-ever, the 2016 food scene unfolds.

BY CLAIRE Z. CRAMER

Remember when we used to think we couldn’t possibly accommodate any more restaurants in this city? It’s 2016 now, and rumors already abound that Lee Farrington is reopening Figa as LB Kitchen soon. Scales may (allegedly) finally open this winter on Commercial Street. The forces of Empire and OTTO are cooking up Hero (takeout sandwiches in Canal Plaza). Rhum Tiki Bar is materializing on Free Street. Woodford Food & Beverage is opening this month. And that’s just to name a few.

It sounds crazy since they feel like old friends now, but all of these restaurants just opened in 2015: Abilene, Crooners & Cocktails, Evo, Figgy’s, Honey Paw, Isa, Ocho, Otherside Deli, Portland Patisserie, Routabou, Tempo Dulu, Terlingua, Tiqa, Tomaso’s, Veranda Noodle House, and Union.

OK, 2016, let’s see what you’ve got.
ROCK DOWN TO...
Washington Avenue

Suppose it’s a cold, dreary mid-week lunch hour. You’re winter-weary and hungry. You need a trip to Washington Avenue.

“What’s good is the diversity,” says Bill Park, co-owner and chef at 3 Buoys on the corner of Washington and Cumberland avenues. His four-year-old seafood and sandwich shack-renowned for its lobster rolls and the breakfasts it serves seven days a week—is festooned inside and out with nets, buoys, starfish, and a zesty array of hot sauce bottles (dozens). With the tenacity of seagulls, a couple is finishing up a burgers and fries feast at a corner table. “And the neighborhood’s a lot nicer than it used to be.”

Half a block away, Tu Casa serves a hearty lunch of Salvadoran food. “Sit wherever you like,” says our smiling hostess, who follows us to a window table and adjust the blinds to admit plenty of daylight. We order a cheese-filled pupusa and a platter of chicken enchiladas to share, and then settle in with the other patrons to watch soccer beamed in from South America. Our selections arrive, with a dish of shredded cabbage in a bright, vinegary dressing and jugs of red and green sauce. As he sets down the green, the waiter utters one word: “Hot.”

The griddled pupusa—a cornmeal pocket—is delicate, and the cheese filling is seductive. Excellent flour tortillas full of hand-shredded chicken and cheese make fine enchiladas. We slosh on some of the green. No kidding ‘hot’—this sauce could cure the common cold! We add more. This adventure for two is less than $12, including tax.

Time for a trip to Silly’s to check out the layer cakes of the day. Here, too, a...
Cajun dishes. The bon temps rouler with a lunch feast of gumbos, etouffées, jambalayas, and live music at noon at USM’s Woodbury Campus Center. wmpg.org

9 MARDI GRAS
“It’s Mardi Gras,” she said, staring pensively out at the falling snow. “I feel nothing.” Oh, yeah? Portland’s Po’ Boys and Pickles on Forest Avenue has the New Orleans vibe all year, but on Fat Tuesdays, look for specials and music. Or head out of town to Ogunquit for a parade and partying; to Hallowell, the self-proclaimed “Little Easy”; or to Camden’s Winterfest, which calls its week-long festival “Maine’s Mardi Gras.”

12-22 SNOFEST
Moosehead Lake’s week-long celebration in Greenville includes chili and chowder cook-offs with prizes Feb. 12, a chocolate festival with treats and games Feb. 14, and an auction. Chase away your winter blues. mooseheadlake.org

16-19 FLAVORS OF FREEPORT
Food and drink, including pairings and demonstrations, showcase the talents of local chefs at Freeport’s inns and restaurants–ice bar, ice luge, and a barbecue. Shop between bites. freeportusa.com

27 FLANAGAN’S TABLE
Chef Amanda Hallowell of Nebo Lodge on North Haven and David Turin of David’s cook up a “Red” themed dinner at Flanagan Farm in Buxton. flanaganstable.com

MARCH
1-12 MAINE RESTAURANT WEEK
Banish your winter blues for good when this annual happening returns for an extended “week.” Chefs all over the state aim to dazzle you with clever fixed-price menus. There’s an epic breakfast cook-off and a flashy cocktail party. In be-
EPICUREAN CALENDAR

APRIL

3 EAT THE HEAT CHILI COOKOFF
Sunday River’s 25th annual fundraiser weekend benefits Sunday River Community Fund. After the Firefighter’s Race, restaurants face off with a Beat-the-Heat chili competition, serving up batches to hungry crowds, with judging and a People’s Choice award. sundayriver.com

2-3 PARROTHEAD
Birds of a feather flock to Sunday River’s food, music, and Margarita Mix-Off among local bartenders, plus a key-lime-pie eating contest. This hugely popular Jimmy Buffett/Key West-themed event is an annual tradition, with a Spam-carving competition and costumes. sundayriver.com

3 CHOCOLATE LOVERS FLING
The highly competitive, meticulously judged by local celebrities, and divinely delicious fund-raiser for SARSSM featuring local chocolatiers moves to the Marriott at Sable Oaks in South Portland for its 30th year. Vote for your favorites in categories including chocolate cake, cheesecake, mousse, fudge, and truffles. chocolateloversfling.org

6 PORTLAND SYMPHONY WINE DINNER & AUCTION
Fine wine and beautiful music highlight the 15th edition of this glamorous annual extravaganza, headlined by a multi-course feast at Freeport’s Harraseeket Inn. Star chefs Nathan Nadeau and Ken Thomas from Fore Street, Matt Ginn of Evo, Josh Berry of Union,
Happy New (Restaurants) Year

Mike Wiley and Andrew Taylor from Honey Paw, and the Harraseeket’s Troy Mains will preside. Maine artists donate art, event tickets, jewelry, getaways, and unusual items to live and silent auctions to benefit the symphony. 773-6128, portlandsymphony.org

12 OLD PORT FESTIVAL Portland’s sprawling, melodic, delicious all-day party offers multiple sound stages for jazz, country, folk, and rock music; all manner of children’s activities; and many jewelry, crafts, clothing, and tchotchke vendors. Even better, there’s a food-stand festival within the festival. Emphasis is on authentic ethnic food from empanadas, curries, dumplings, and noodles to the usual french-fried snacks. portlandmaine.com

25 MAINE WHOOPIE PIE FESTIVAL Bakers from far and wide bring these much-loved, cream-filled little pucks—in ever fancier flavors from pumpkin to chocolate chip to root beer float to blueberry pancake—to Dover Foxcroft to be sampled and judged. Main Street is blocked off for a day of music, kids’ stuff, rides, games, vendors, throngs for souvlaki, gyros, moussaka, spanakopita, Greek wine, strong Greek coffee—and heavenly Greek pastries made by tireless Greek church ladies. Dance off the Dionysian feast to live Greek music. 774-0281, holytrinityportland.com

28 FLANAGAN’S TABLE The theme is “Yellow” when Krista Kern Desjarlais of Bresca and The Purple House teams with Josh Potocki of 158 Pickett Street at Flanagan Farm’s popular dinner series. flanaganstable.com

JUNE

6-11 KENNEBUNKPORT FESTIVAL Food, wine, and fine art come together in this event, with special meals prepared by restaurant chefs, and wine and art receptions around the village. 772-3373, kennebunkportfestival.com

23-25 GREEK FESTIVAL The annual party under the big tent on the corner of Park and Pleasant streets at Portland’s Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church draws

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Tickets are $16 in advance; $20 at the door and include hors d’oeuvres. Buy your tickets online now before they sell out. Space will be limited.

4 NOBLE STREET | BRUNSWICK, ME | THEBRUNSWICKHOTELANDTAVERN.COM
Portland’s a competitive sandwich town—we know this. But have you tried the Smokey biscuit at Figgy’s? How did chef/owner Natalie DiBenedetto (inset, right, at the window of her takeout palace on Walker Street) somehow make the combination of roasted eggplant rounds, smoked gouda, paper-thin slices of red onion, sprouts, and “paprika mayo” on a hot biscuit into the most divine lunch? DiBenedetto flashes her Mona Lisa smile. “A few of my favorite things,” she says.

And how about the Otherside Deli’s Banh Mi sandwich (inset, bottom right) on Veranda Street? House cured, meaty pork belly on a hot, crisp baguette schmeared with house-made chicken liver mouse and garnished with the requisite julienned fresh veggies, cilantro, and pickled jalapeno slivers ($9)? Just perfect. “We cure all our meats here,” says chef/owner Peter Sueltenfuss, a fixture in notable Portland kitchens for the past eight years, including at Fore Street and Miyake, and most recently as executive chef at Grace. “And all our meat is from Maine farms. Whole-animal processing and charcuterie is what I’d always been aiming for.” Check out the house-cured corned beef, pastrami and bacon; smoked poultry; and a line of sausages, including the stunning chicken florentine.

and, well, makin’ whoopie. 564-8943, mainewhoopiepiefestival.com

JULY
8-10 MOXIE FESTIVAL
Carbonated fun–plus Moxie ice cream, a Moxie recipe contest, Friday night fireworks, Saturday’s Moxie parade, a 5K race, music, entertainment—it’s a weekend-long celebration of the soda they call “Maine in a bottle” in Lisbon Falls. moxiefestival.com

8-10 GREEK HERITAGE FESTIVAL
A 3-day homage to Greek culture, traditional food, and folk arts includes live music and dancing in Saco takes place on the grounds of St. Demetrios Greek Orthodox church. The Byzantine architecture of church and stunning iconography inside are well worth touring. 284-5651

9-17 MAINE POTATO BLOSSOM FESTIVAL
The 69th annual homage to Maine’s famous tuber takes place in Fort Fairfield when the potato blossoms are in bloom. Races, farmer competitions, mashed potato wrestling, potatoes cooked up many ways, a lobster and clam bake, contests, pageants, and the crowning of a Potato Blossom Queen. fortfairfield.org

11-16 CENTRAL MAINE EGG FESTIVAL
Pittsfield’s annual egg-stravaganza celebrates

WINTERGUIDE 2016 45
chickens and eggs in a big way. The brown egg industry sponsors a parade, street dance, window-painting contest, kids’ events, early-bird breakfast, chicken barbecue, egg-lympics, fireworks, and contests for best quiche, cheesecake, and pie. pittsfield.org

15-17 YARMOUTH CLAM FESTIVAL
Every year, for the past half-century, when the third Friday in July rolls around, it’s time to fete the beloved bivalves for three whole days—clams are fried, steamed, chopped into chowders and clam cakes, plus there’s a shucking contest, live music, crafts, and a road race. The food stalls are run by volunteers, and your clam-roll lunch supports an array of nonprofit organizations. 846-3984, clamfestival.com

15-17 MAINE CELTIC CELEBRATION
Come celebrate 10 years! On the waterfront in Belfast, enjoy music, food, Highland Games, a Kilted Canter race, and a unique cheese-rolling championship involving entire wheels of the State of Maine Cheese Company’s cheeses. mainecelticcelebration.com

20-23 CULINARY SCHOOL CRUISE
Take a cooking vacation at sea aboard the J&E Riggin with schooner chef and author Annie Mahle, cooking with vegetables from her own garden and seafood fresh from Penobscot Bay. The cruise repeats August 22-25. 800-869-0604, mainewindjammer.com

24 OPEN FARM DAY
Farms all over the state open their gates to the public for tours on this summer Sunday. Animals for petting, fresh farm produce to sample and shop for—this is an annual chance to experience where Maine food comes from, right at the source. getrealmaine.com; maine.gov

31 FLANAGAN’S TABLE
The theme is “Pink,” and the chefs are Wilson Rothschild of Terlingua and Anders Talberg of Roustabout at Flanagan Farm’s dinner series in Buxton. flanaganstable.com

AUGUST

3-7 MAINE LOBSTER FESTIVAL
Every year, 20,000 pounds of Maine’s superstar crustaceans are devoured at Rockland’s annual bash. This year, “dedicated volunteers to the community” are honored. There’s a big parade, a seafood cooking contest for amateur chefs, kids’ events, a road race, arts and crafts, and the coronation of the festival Sea Goddess. The harbor setting on Penobscot Bay is hard to beat. 596-0376, mainelobsterfestival.com

7 FLANAGAN’S TABLE The theme is “Black,” and they’re calling it the “Sous Chef Dinner” this month at Flanagan Farm’s popular...
**BRAVO!**

Portlanders first discovered **patatas bravas**—the tasty Spanish tapa made from chips or small wedges of potato-fried, subtly seasoned, and drizzled with spicy aioli—at Local 188. An addictive version appears on Tapas Mondays at Lolita. Most recently, we struck gold at Abilene in Woodford’s Corner. Chef-owners Anna Connolly and Travis Colgan turn hand-cut wedges (with skins still on) into crisp-edged, tender transcendent papas bravas draped in roasted red pepper aioli (above).

*Adieu, poutine!*

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**WINTER GUIDE 2016**

5-7 **PLOYE FESTIVAL AND MUSKIE DERBY**

Ployes are the traditional buckwheat pancakes of the exiled Acadian French who settled northern Maine, and muskies are the local game fish. They intersect in a food/cultural/fishing event every summer in Fort Kent. 834-5354, fortkentchamber.com

12-15 **ACADIAN FESTIVAL**

The founding Acadian families who first settled the St. John Valley hold a family reunion every summer for one of the families. The public is invited to the concurrent festival of events that celebrate traditional food, crafts, music, cultural displays, a parade, and “Party du Main Street.” acadianfestival.com

20 **HIGHLAND GAMES**

The Topsham Fairgrounds is the place for the annual celebration of Scots culture. See Highland dancers, pipe bands, sporting events, dog trials, and a chance to feast on Maine-made haggis. Wear plaid and come hungry. mainehighlandgames.org

27 **WELLS CHILI FEST**

International Chili Society-sanctioned, juried competitions in the red, verde, and salsa categories for serious

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**Epicurean Calendar**

- **SEPTEMBER**
  - **9-11 MOUNT DESERT ISLAND GARLIC FESTIVAL** The Smuggler's Den Campground turns into something of a garlic Woodstock. Area restaurants serve gourmet garlic creations, including garlic bread, garlic burritos, garlic brownies, and garlic cotton candy. Festival co-founder and party-guy Frank Pendola sells his “artisanal barbecue.” Many farms participate in the farmers’ market; arts and crafts vendors set up their wares; and musicians and brewers add to the fun. nostrano.com
  - **17 HARVEST FEST & CHOWDER COOK-OFF** This autumn celebration of the start of fall foliage season includes two cookoffs—chowder and apple pie—along with vendors, farmers, crafts, and music. For 18 years, this annual attraction has been a big draw for the Bethel village common on the third Saturday in September. 824-2282 bethelmaine.com
  - **23-25 COMMON GROUND COUNTRY FAIR** It’s the Earth Mother of Maine’s agricultural fairs, sponsored by the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association. Organic food vendors, cooking demonstrations, folk arts, and talks by chefs, farmers, and fishermen about growing, preserving, storing, and preparing local organic produce, livestock, and seafood. 568-4142, mofga.org

- **OCTOBER**
  - **6 SIGNATURE CHEF AUCTION** The annual elegant event for the March of Dimes "takes place upstairs at DiMillo’s on Portland’s
Bistro Sorti & Hola, Ocho

She’s gotta move: We gaze for the last time from Petite Jacqueline’s picture window on Longfellow Square (left) on New Year’s Eve. Owners Steve and Michelle Corry promise Petite will return in a new space this spring. In the meantime, OTTO Pizza’s marketing manager, Eric Shepherd, confirms that OCHO, their creative-burrito offspring, will move into Petite’s vacated space on State Street. “We realized the concept behind OCHO is probably bigger than the space it’s in now [at 654 Congress Street]. We’d like to provide a lot more interesting ingredients, with plenty of space to eat, and a bar.” OTTO’s owners Mike Keon and Anthony Allen keep busy. They’re also forging into the Back Cove/outer Forest Avenue neighborhood, with a full-service OTTO restaurant to open at 250 Read Street, and expanding their Yarmouth space.

Long Wharf,” says event coordinator Rebecca Spear. “It’s a great sampling from local chefs. We expect Elsmere BBQ, the Frog & Turtle, and DiMillo’s chef Melissa Bouchard and plenty of others.” Wine and dine and then bid on silent and live auction goods. “The chef’s tasting dinners as auction items are really popular.” 289-2080, marchofdimes.com/maine

1-10 DAMARISCUOTA PUMPKINFEST & REGATTA This is the ultimate pumpkin celebration—there’s a pumpkin boat regatta, a pumpkin derby, pumpkin hurl and catapult, kids’ events, pumpkin pie eating contest, pumpkin pancake breakfast, pumpkin carving, a pumpkin parade. The professional growers’ competition has $10,000 in prize money. damariscottapumpkinfest.com

2 FLANAGAN’S TABLE It’s October, so the theme is “Orange.” Chef power-couple Ilma Lopez and Damian Sansonetti of Piccolo and Blue Rooster join Andrew Taylor and Michael Wiley of Hugo’s in Buxton at Flanagan Farm’s popular dinner series. flanaganstable.com

1 CHOWDAH CHALLENGE Freeport’s Fall Festival weekend is all about art and music and food, including this competition in which area restaurant chefs compete for brag-
HUNGRY EYE

Epicurean Calendar

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Dine around town via trolley

“These turned out to be so popular that we’re already planning the 2016 schedule,” says coordinator Nicki Bean, of the successful progressive dinners—via trolley—the Nonantum Resort runs at some of Kennebunkport’s most popular restaurants. “You start and finish here at the Nonantum with a champagne toast. The first two stops are appetizers, then an entree stop. Dessert is back here. The $95 ticket covers one course and one drink and the gratuity at each stop.” Stops may include Salt + Honey, Old Vines Wine Bar, Craft Cocktails & Kitchen; One Dock Prime, Stripers, Bandaloop, Jillyanna’s Wood-fired Kitchen, and Ocean at the Cape Arundel Inn. All this and you never have to give a thought to parking. “Our progressive trolley dinners are always on Sunday nights, during the shoulder seasons and right through Christmas Prelude.” Check nonantumresort.com for the first dates in late spring.

5 Open creamery day Cheese makers around the state invite you to tour and taste their wares. Maine has more than 70 licensed cheese makers (second only to New York state)–and many have won awards. Here’s your chance to check out the cheese scene. See mainecheeseguild.org for the list of participating creameries.

15 York Harvestfest

5 0 portland monthly magazine
Two days of traditional fall harvest food, activities, crafts, pony rides, and live music at York Beach. maineoktoberfest.org

16 GREAT MAINE APPLE DAY
Explore the history and variety of Maine apples through apple cooking, cider-making, art, tree care workshops, and tastings of some of Maine’s rare and heirloom apples at the Common Ground Educational Center in Unity. Farms around the state invite you to pick your own. 568-4142, mofga.org

19-23 HARVEST ON THE HARBOR
Thousands flock to Portland to experience Maine cuisine at this busy, delicious and well-run extravaganza. Spectacular celebrity-chef feast events, tastings of Maine grown and produced food and drink, and a “big eat” opportunity to sample offerings from dozens of local eateries and beverage purveyors in one large venue. Most events are held on the waterfront. Plan ahead because quite a few events sell out. harvestontheharbor.com

NOVEMBER
SAUERKRAUT FROM MORSE’S
Every autumn, the late, great cabbage king

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Virgil Morse would run a classified ad in the Lincoln County News: “Kraut’s ready.” Nowadays, the fresh sauerkraut at Morse’s in Waldoboro is produced almost year-round, but owners David Swetnam and Jacque Sawyer still run the little November ad—they’re happy to perpetuate the perception that autumn is kraut season, as it was when Virgil first started fermenting his fall cabbage crop into legend in 1918. The kraut can be found in many Hannafords and neighborhood groceries; it’s on the menu at Moody’s and at Fore Street. And Morse’s on Route 220 is a lot more than a kraut shop—it’s a destination, with a European market, an extensive deli, and a German deli/restaurant. To this day, Morse’s sauerkraut is only sold fresh, never canned or bottled. 832-5569, morsessauerkraut.com

19 LE BEAUJOLAIS NOUVEAU EST ARRIVÉ An annual event that begins with a pressing of the gamay grape in a few designated French villages every autumn turns into a Beaujolais nouveau event at a zillion restaurants around the world on the third Thursday in November. Celebrate in Portland at the Little Tap House, MJ’s Wine Bar, and Portland Patisserie.

DECEMBER

3 FLANAGAN’S TABLE The theme is “White.” Chef Larry Matthews of Back Bay Grill collaborates with chef Jason Williams from the Well at the year’s final feast at Flanagan Farm’s popular dinner series in Buxton. flanaganstable.com

3 EARMUFF DAY Better known as Chester Greenwood Day, this ice blast is in Farmington, hometown of the native son who invented earmuffs there in 1873 at the age of 15 when his ears got cold while ice skating. He’s celebrated every December on the first Saturday, with a parade and day of festivities that include gingerbread house and chili competitions and an earmuff fashion show. franklincountymaine.org

2-4 & 9-11 CHRISTMAS PRELUDE Kennebunkport’s wonder-filled holiday celebration lasts two weekends in December, with candlelight caroling, holiday shopping with refreshments, special restaurant meals, Christmas decorations, hot chocolate, crafts, a tree lighting and the arrival of Santa via lobster boat. christmasprelude.com