

Vegans Cash In at VAULTED CUISINE

Heather Kristian



Although a former bank may seem an odd choice of venue in which to dine, thirty-nine guests of the Vegetarian Society of South Jersey (VSSJ) did just that on April 6 2015 in Vaulted Cuisine, the student-run restaurant of the Culinary Arts Center at Rowan College

at Burlington County. Located in historic Mount Holly NJ, Vaulted Cuisine's namesake vault door is swung open to the staging area, adding a stunning visual dimension to the dining experience. VSSJ Vice President of Operations, Steve Fenster, was instrumental in the planning of the event. "With the success of AVS's dinners at Carême's," says Steve, "I thought the relatively new RCBC Culinary Arts Center would be a good opportunity to enjoy a gourmet vegan meal, and provide the benefit for the students, as future chefs, to learn to prepare what a growing number of their customers will request."

VSSJ worked with RCBC Events Coordinator Patty DeGeorge to create a delectable dining experience, while Program Director Chef Beth Dinice composed a vegan menu. Diners had a choice of five appetizers: carrot-curry soup with tarragon oil (photo 1); gazpacho; bibb and endive salad with tomato and green-apple dressing; wedge salad with pickled cucumbers, carrots, and white-balsamic vinaigrette; white-bean dip with homemade pita. Five entrées from which to select were: smoked portobello with

quinoa and asparagus (photo 2); deep-fried tofu with soba noodles and vegetables; curried vegetables with basmati rice; barley risotto with black beans, cilantro, jalapeno, and lemon zest; three-bean chili with cornbread. A choice of three desserts completed the meal: fresh berries with mint, vanilla-simple syrup, and lemon zest (photo 3); coffee granita; cantaloupe soup with lime zest. Several menu items were gluten-free options.

As a thank you for all of their hard work in creating a truly delicious meal, VSSJ gifted each of the seventeen front- and back-of-house students, as well as the three instructors, a copy of Brook Katz's *New Favorites* to help them further expand their vegan culinary horizons.

Such a great time was had by all that an autumnal dinner is in the planning stages. This was our first time hosting this type of negotiated event. We did it; you can too!

Heather Kristian became a vegetarian at fourteen, a vegan at twenty-one, and has served as Secretary for the VSSJ for four years. She has an MFA in Creative Writing from Arcadia University, and remains active in the Delaware Valley literary scene.



Check out VSSJ.com for information on future dinners, free lectures, potlucks, outreach, and other events. Connect with VSSJ: facebook.com/TheVSSJ, twitter.com/TheVSSJ, and phone 609-848-VEG1 (8341).



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