



OUR BACKYARD

FARM FRESH FAMILY FUN

Chattooga Belle Farm shows off local produce, mountain views at bistro

BY CHRISTINA CLEVELAND
THE JOURNAL

LONG CREEK — Quick, think of a place where a family can sit and eat a farm-fresh lunch, enjoy an uninterrupted view of the mountains and take a basket of fresh fruit home when the day is done.

There aren't a lot, according to Chattooga Belle Farm owner Ed Land.

"Where can you go and sit on a farm and have lunch?" he said. "To sit on a farm, walk over and pick a peach, and then sit down to have a sandwich. There are not many places that I know of anyway."

This opportunity will become available for those who dine at Chattooga Belle Thursday when Land and his wife, Kitty, host the grand opening of their restaurant, Belle's Bistro, for the season.

This is the second year the farm will serve lunch, and the restaurant is open every day from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. May through October. Its menu offers a variety of salads, soups, sandwiches and burgers.

"The bistro was a huge success last year — very busy. People come from all over. It has a great menu," Kitty said. "It's getting really popular, and people are waiting for us to open."

Dining at Belle's Bistro ranges from \$7 to \$8.50 per entrée, but the view from the patio is free.

There, customers can dine with not only a picturesque view of the Blue Ridge Mountains, but

the rural countryside of the farm's 138 acres that are lined with apple trees, peach orchards and berry patches.

"I think the view itself is what overwhelms people here," said Belle's Bistro chef Melissa Smart. "I was amazed at how many people would stay, pull up a rocking chair and have a glass of wine."

Smart, who worked for a cafe in Clayton, Ga. for 12 years, introduced the idea of serving lunch to Kitty

'If you find (a view) better than this, let me know, 'cause I want to see it.'

Ed Land

Chattooga Belle Farm owner last year.

Many of the lunch items she prepares contain local foods and Chattooga Belle Farm's produce and seasonal fruit.

The burgers and chili are made with the farm's grass-fed Black Angus beef, and all apple products served — are made from Chattooga Belle produce.

Smart said last year's favorite menu item was the turkey sandwich, which also contains Chattooga Belle Farm apples, fresh spinach, cheddar cheese and pesto. Appetizers and kids' sandwiches are also available, along with a daily dessert special.

Like the bistro, the farm store is one of the many attractions at Chattooga Belle Farm. The store is open every day from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and sells canned

foods, local honey from the farm's new beehive, craft items, toys and eight wines made from farm-grown fruit.

"People can really rely on us being here," Kitty said. "We have a community pot luck once a month, there is an observation circle to view the skies, and the farm is always open to foot traffic."

Other services provided at Chattooga Belle Farm include U-pick produce, an 18-hole disc golf course, a playground and educational farm tours to learn about irrigation at Horseshoe Lake and visit the mountain range.

The Lands bought the farm in 2005 and named it after the nearby Chattooga River and Ed's grandmothers — Laura Belle and May Belle. Before the two bought the farm, it was an unattended apple orchard that was once a part of a 2,000-acre plot owned by Groucho Marx.

"It took us four years to clear the land of thousands of apple trees, and then we replanted," Kitty said.

Today, the farm consists of a variety of berry patches, fruit and nut trees, cattle, llamas and, by early fall, the county's first micro-distillery, where Ed says they intend to make their own fruit brandy.

Ed, who worked in construction for 30 years, now works full-time at the farm and is hands-on with almost everything.

"I get here at 8 o'clock, open the building and (go) out on the farm managing



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Belle's Bistro offers the chance to enjoy a salami and hummus sandwich on whole wheat pita bread while taking in the Blue Ridge Mountains. When in-season, Chattooga Belle Farm has U-pick produce.

whatever is needed to be done. It's a variety if anything else," he said.

He and Kitty work as a team alongside a regular 13-person staff, which helps with maintenance, business, catering and weddings, which are the biggest attraction and revenue at the farm.

The staff now includes Ed's son, Barrett, who moved to the Upstate from Florida last year. Having worked for Disney, Barrett has a background in entertainment and wants to encourage a family-friendly atmosphere at the farm.

"It's great for older people

and younger kids, and you don't have to take them on a long hike or anything else; you can just drive up and see this great view," Barrett said.

According to Barrett, Belle's Bistro made a great profit last year and "broke even," which is uncommon for a first-year restaurant. Kitty said the bistro served around 125 lunches on the weekends and about 50 during the week.

"The food is great; we

have a wonderful chef," Ed said. "We're using local foods as much as possible, but the view — if you find one better than this, let me know, 'cause I want to see it."

The bistro hosts lunch every day, and guests can check the farm's website, chattoogabellefarm.com, to find out if there is limited space due to weddings or other events.



From yoga, community pot lucks, hiking, farm-fresh apple products and breathtaking views to the turkey sandwich with cilantro pesto that chef Melissa Smart crafts, Chattooga Belle Farm has something for everyone in the family to enjoy.



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