

Chopmist Charlie's celebrates thirteenth anniversary

By Sam Bari

Serving dishes that are steeped in the deepest traditions of New England "Yankee" seafood with a Jamestown twist, Chopmist Charlie's celebrates its thirteenth anniversary on Labor Day.

Owner, Chuck Masso, invites everybody to join him and his staff at the gala festivities.

From a bowl of the heartiest chowder to an expertly prepared catch of the day, made special by Chopmist Charlie's executive chef, Chris Olobri, the best of the best authentic seafood fare satisfies diners on a daily basis.

Favored by locals, Masso attributes the success of the popular Narragansett Avenue restaurant to his dedicated staff and strong local ties.

According to his employees, a lot of the credit has to go to Masso himself, who goes out and catches the "catch of the day" several times a week so he can guarantee freshness.

"I try to get out three times a week," Masso said. "I catch a variety of fish so we can offer a good representation of the array of seafood that is locally available." Everything Masso lands is expertly filleted and prepared by executive chef Olobri who strives to "offer diners traditional seafood cooked in a way that is not available anywhere else," he said.

Masso says that 90 percent of his steady customer base is comprised of locals. "If you ask the lo-



Bartender Joe Gabriele, left, owner Chuck Masso, center, and executive chef Chris Olobri await their patrons at Chopmist Charlie's. Photo by Sam Bari

cals where they go to eat, they say Chopmist Charlie's," Masso says. "We have a good reputation with the people who live here. They are very loyal," he added.

Masso, 51, was born in Scituate and he began working in a clam shack when he was 14 years old. He has been cooking for a living ever since. After graduating from high school and majoring in business at Bryant University, Masso joined the U. S. Coast Guard and became a food service officer for four years.

Using skills learned at the

Coast Guard Culinary Arts School in Petaluma, Cal., Masso traveled around the country and throughout the Caribbean, working in hotels and ski resorts as a chef. His background and experience landed him jobs wherever he went. He eventually tired of constantly moving and returned to Rhode Island where he was hired as the food and beverage director at the Viking Hotel in Newport from 1984 to 1986.

He then served as executive chef at the Bay Voyage Inn where he stayed for two years before moving to Florida in 1988 to open

"Venice Gardens Seafood," the first restaurant of his own, in the town of Venice. The success of the Venice Gardens inspired him to open three additional restaurants in quick succession in Sarasota, Naples, and St. Petersburg.

When his mother took ill in 1994, Masso sold the Florida businesses and returned to Jamestown to establish a restaurant at the Jamestown Country Club. There, he hired several of the staff that are with him to this day.

In 1996, he opened Chopmist Charlie's on Labor Day weekend,

naming it after Chopmist Hill in his hometown of Scituate. He took administrator Candi Clarke, bartender Joe Gabriele, executive chef Chris Olobri, and bartender Jim Grogan with him. All are now part of the Chopmist Charlie's managerial staff.

Additionally, chef Dave Rajotte and wife Denise have been with Masso for more than 10 years. Dave is the kitchen manager and he and his wife together manage the catering business.

"We're like family here," Masso said. "We've only hired one new waitress in 12 years."

Chopmist Charlie's recipes are featured in three cookbooks. Masso's establishment is one of 16 restaurants in the country that were selected for the renowned cookbook, "Recipes from the Road."

The restaurant was recently dubbed, "The Cheers of Jamestown" by Ted Rhinestine, host of ABC television show "The Chronicle," which featured Chopmist Charlie's on the popular weekly program.

Chuck Masso is a past president of the Jamestown Chamber of Commerce. He served a six-year term on the board of directors of the Rhode Island Hospitality and Tourism Association.

Chopmist Charlie's on Narragansett Avenue is open from 11:30 a.m. to 9:30 p.m. during the week. Weekend hours are from 11:30 a.m. to 10 p.m.

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