

December 16, 2009

A 'Grand' tradition

Point Clear resort's favorite dishes featured on Christmas menu, in new cookbook

By Robyn Bradley Litchfield

Since opening its doors in 1847, The Grand Marriott Resort, Golf Club & Spa has maintained a standard of Southern elegance.

The 162-year-old resort at Point Clear is celebrating its rich blend of history, culture and cuisine with its first book, "Grand Traditions" (PCH Hotels & Resorts, October 2009, \$44.95). It's a striking coffee-table book featuring tidbits about the resort's traditions, many of its guests and staff members and a number of the most popular recipes, including its most-requested dessert -- bread pudding with whiskey sauce using The Grand's century-old recipe.

"We call it our coffee-table book, but there are a lot of inspiring stories about the history of the hotel with traditions new and old," said "Grand Traditions" executive editor Michael Herzog.

And though the book contains recipes, it goes beyond preparations and includes the stories and people behind the various dishes. Being the resort's first book, this compilation seemed only fitting, Herzog said.

Executive Chef Mike Wallace agreed and said one of the highlights of The Grand's year is its monthlong Christmas celebration, which begins on the heels of Thanksgiving and gives the chef and his culinary team a chance to really shine as they create a gingerbread village for the lobby.

"It really sets the tone for the entire Christmas season," said Wallace, who also creates an impressive spread for the holidays that features soups, salads, meats and seafood dishes, a variety of entrees and desserts from Our Pastry Shoppe. This year's Christmas Day buffet will include such entrees as Braised Kobe Beef Short Ribs in a Chianti-Rosemary Reduction, Grand Marnier Duck Ravioli with Sage Parmesan Cream Sauce and Pan Seared Local Grouper presented with Stir-Fried Vegetables and a Red Thai Curry Sauce.

The Grand's bread pudding, of course, will be part of the Christmas spread.

"It is outstanding -- but simple to make," he said of the recipe featured on page 49 of "Grand Traditions." And the Apple Pie Eggnog A La Mode, featured on page 157, is another tradition at the resort and very popular this time of year. "It's a nice twist on traditional eggnog," he added.

Several pages are dedicated to more recent traditions, including the Chef's Garden, where seasonal herbs, vegetables and fruits are grown to provide Wallace and his staff with the freshest of ingredients. Another special place is the Secret Garden, where many a couple have shared an intimate and elegant dinner that often results in someone dropping to one knee and popping the question.

But this time of year, The Grand really pulls out all the stops and provides guests with the ultimate Christmas experience, one that continues to draw guests back year after year.

Herzog said some families have been coming to The Grand for generations. One of the most enjoyable parts of working on this book was collecting stories from some of the resort's regulars, some of whom have been coming to Point Clear for more than 50 years, he said.

"I got so much more out of talking with people," said Herzog, who added that it took about six months to gather all the information. He said it was time well spent, discovering so much more than what was included in the book.