

## 2008 Readers' Choice Local Heroes Award Winners

By Melinda Feucht

The votes are in! ETC's readers have spoken and culled the Twin Cities' vast array of food heroes down to their top picks for our 2008 Local Food Heroes Awards. You may not see the winners wearing capes around town, but they are all superheroes in the eyes, taste buds, and stomachs of the folks they feed, educate, and serve.

### **BEST FARM or FARMER – Tie**

*Alan and Lori Callister*

Alan and Lori Callister of West Concord, Minnesota, are no strangers to Twin Cities shoppers; they've been selling their chicken and turkey at Twin Cities farmers' markets for years. But their latest venture, Callister's Farm in the Market, is driven by a desire to make high-quality food available to all people, no matter their income level. They've set up a permanent retail location in a neighborhood that has, until recently, been under-served in the local food arena. Alan and Lori's store, located in the Midtown Global Market, doesn't just sell turkey and chicken. They also represent many other local farmers and food artisans, allowing customers to purchase just about anything they could want for a quick lunch or a Sunday dinner. Farming is in the Callisters' blood, as the farm has been in Alan's family since 1856, but being able to see the pleasure the end product brings their customers is one of the best parts of the job. The Callisters support the local food movement wholeheartedly. "We promote it as much as possible to our customers, not only for our own products, but for others as well," noted Lori. "We try to make them aware of the benefits of keeping the money in the state and helping out the rural economy."

*Prairie Pride Farm*

Roger and Dawn Hubmer operate a small, 5<sup>th</sup>-generation family farm raising pastured chickens and heritage-breed pork near Mankato, Minnesota. The Hubmers take pride in their sustainable farming practices. The feed they use comes from their own fields, which keeps the animals healthy and fosters a connection to

the land. The relationship with nature the family experiences is one of Dawn's favorite parts about running the farm. The appreciation and happy faces of their customers make the hard work involved with running the farm worth it, according to Dawn. Being able to see the reaction of the end consumer is not something every farmer gets to enjoy. Prairie Pride products can be found in many local stores, but the Hubmers get to meet their customers face to face at the St. Paul Farmers' Market. "Right now, a lot of consumers feel like they don't have choices in the grocery store. Everything is pre-packaged and pre-cut," said Dawn. "We are giving choices so people can eat directly from the farm."

### **BEST CHEF/RESTAURANT**

*Lucia Watson; Lucia's Restaurant and Wine Bar*

Lucia's Restaurant has graced Uptown for 23 years. Lucia Watson, a third-generation Minnesotan, loves both her home state and the farmers who play an integral role in her restaurant. "I can't serve things that they don't grow," Lucia says. "If they come in and show me something they're excited about, that has a huge impact on what I'll be serving." The decision to base her restaurant mostly on local and seasonal ingredients wasn't strategic. Watson said, "It wasn't that conscious, it's sort of what I did." Watson also serves on the board of the Youth Farm and Market Project and more recently has become a board member for the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy. She is excited about educating the community about emerging food issues. The best part of her job, according to Watson, is making people happy. "I love serving people in a hospitality setting." Lucia's favorite item on her menu? A house-made vanilla ice cream with chocolate-covered pistachios.

### **BEST NON-PROFIT**

*Youth Farm and Market Project*

The Youth Farm and Market Project is about social change and using food to effectively create a better world. The program engages Twin Cities youth in agriculture, local food, and the community through managing several garden plots in the city and then selling what they produce. An important part of the program is the connection that is made between the youth and community members. Youth

Farm and Market Project participants are also able to take lessons learned from their work in the gardens and use them in their daily lives. Youth Farm isn't just about serving the youth, but about engaging them in something that has a direct impact on others by giving the community access to affordable produce. "So much of our world now continues to get bigger and more expansive, including our food. Keeping our focus local allows for real community building—youth connect to all different people and activities in their neighborhood," says Gunnar Liden, executive director of the Youth Farm and Market Project. The local-food focus also gives the teenagers a context for themselves in their neighborhood. As the youth engage in their community, they learn of relevant neighborhood issues. Gunnar says they eventually make connections in their community beyond food. "To engage youth in something that matters to them and to their community, while at the same time having fun and creating lifelong friendships, we feel that is priceless. We realize that our work fits into a bigger picture of change. The lessons and experiences that youth have at Youth Farm are focused on both the here and now, but also on who and what they will be in the world five, ten, and even twenty years from now."

## **BEST FOOD ARTISAN**

*Laurie McCann Crowell; Golden Fig Fine Foods*

Laurie McCann Crowell's business philosophy is simple, "If I wouldn't feed it to my children, I won't sell it in my store," which is why you won't find products containing high-fructose corn syrup, hydrogenated oils, or artificial colors there. (Except for the occasional red-frosted Valentine's cookie.) Her store is Golden Fig Fine Foods, where she sells all sorts of tasty things from small, local producers, along with her own handmade spice blends, oils, and vinegars. Laurie got her start selling her spices at the St. Paul Farmers' Market where her proximity to farmers and fresh food helped influence her food sensibilities. "When the asparagus is grown

here it's a thousand times better than when it's shipped in," she said. "Food is so much more nutritionally complete when it's from the local source." Crowell is involved in the Twin Cities food community in other ways too. She's a member of Les Dames d'Escoffier, an organization that regularly volunteers with Eastside Garden Project, and she works with Kids Café, a program that provides low-income kids with hot meals. Two of Laurie's favorite products in her store are slices of baguette from Rustica with her own smoked trout spread made with trout from Star Prairie Trout Farm.

### **BEST BEVERAGE ARTISAN**

*Mindy Kelly; Mrs. Kelly's Tea*

Mindy Kelly's love of tea comes from memories of her grandmother. "She loved tea and always had fun teacups," said Kelly. Her grandmother was a good cook and projected a confidence that inspired Kelly to take her tea to the Minneapolis Farmers Market fifteen years ago. "I always kind of fooled around with herbs and herbal teas [and] thought they were a fun thing to explore," said Kelly. She noticed quality tea wasn't very easy to find in the Twin Cities and decided to do something about it. Her company started to take on a life of its own. Mrs. Kelly's Tea comes in over 300 blends and can also be custom ordered. She often works with restaurant owners to develop custom blends for their menus. Despite a busy schedule year round, Mindy still finds ways to give back to the community that supports her. She holds a tea tasting in the winter, donating the proceeds to organizations such as Second Harvest and Perspectives Kids Café. Mindy doesn't spend a morning without Early Grey.