

## CULINARY CHARACTER

## KEVIN BOOSE

This chef left his corporate job to return to his culinary roots, opening a casual lunch spot. Three years later, The Press has evolved into so much more.

By Lauren Eastman | Photography by Brian Miller

I sat down with Kevin Boose on a rare quiet Monday morning to learn more about the concept that has taken St. Augustine diners by storm. During our hour-long conversation, at least thirty potential diners came to the door of **The Press**, hoping to get a table at the neighborhood hotspot.

What is it that makes The Press so special? The short answer is that this casual eatery has an excellent balance of ambiance and flavor. An open kitchen and welcoming bar offering a vibrant centerpiece to the intimate gastropub. But it's more than that – every dish is made with passion and helps to fulfill a lifetime dream.

Kevin's humble beginnings shaped his understanding of what it takes to make good food and enjoy it with good company. He remembers his mother teaching him how to knead dough in their Lancaster, Pennsylvania kitchen, and his family's Dutch and German heritage was always reflected in meals shared around that table. At only 12 years old, Kevin took a job as a dishwasher at Nannie Lee's Strawberry Mansion in Melbourne, Florida and was immersed in the art of fine dining.

In his 20s, Kevin joined the first class at the Culinary Institute of America (CIA) that was given the opportunity to go on to Greystone in Napa. After graduating, he left for Boston, where he worked with Jody Adams at Red Clay Brick Oven, cooking delectable meals in terra cotta pots. He worked his way through numerous hotel kitchens to an Italian restaurant named Apettito, and into the role of sous chef at Skipjacks – a high-volume seafood spot. Each experience shaped another facet of his industry understanding, preparing him for restaurant ownership.

Kevin met his wife Simone at Café Lampara, a seafood-driven Italian restaurant that means “fisherman's light.” He was working on the line as she served as *garde manger*. They tied the knot two years later, welcoming son Kevin in December of 2000, followed by daughters Marina and Gabi.

With the kids in tow, they returned to Florida to be closer to family. Kevin became Regional Manager for Panera Bread until the demands of home with young children moved him out of the restaurant scene to support a nationwide network of home care medical providers.

While it finally gave him the time to buy a boat

and go fishing, the job never quite held his attention like the restaurant world did.

The Press, which celebrates three years this October, has evolved from its beginnings as a sandwich shop serving craft beers to a must-stop neighborhood spot boasting the best burgers in town and an intensely loyal customer base. “The response has been so much larger than what we imagined,” says Kevin. “People really love an independent restaurant. We cater to locals – many of whom eat here 3-4 times a week.”

The menu is largely rustic Italian. Kevin's relentless focus on quality demands using only the freshest ingredients, while he leads the team in creating dishes with passion and talent. Fresh bread is even baked onsite daily.

Kevin says that the popularity of the burgers happened by chance – the same humble credit he gives to his own success. The key to the Angus Ground Chuck is fat content for juiciness and proper seasoning. All of the meat used at The Press is in the top 17% of all beef in the U.S. and ranges from Select to Prime grades.

Calamari is cut by hand and breaded in-



house. The vital part of the dish, Kevin says, is the ginger vinaigrette flavored by grilled-off pineapple. But one would be remiss to overlook the twelve or so other ingredients that make up this seemingly simple appetizer. Fresh ginger meets green scallions as red and rice wine vinegars dance with sesame oil and garlic, finished with cilantro and parsley to top things off.

Flatbreads are a staple on the menu, and despite his efforts to change the toppings, the popularity of guests' favorites do not allow for much variation. The Mediterranean with marinated plum tomatoes, crumbled feta, and olives is loved by vegetarians, while the Steak and Spinach offers carnivores a mix of sliced steak, cherry peppers, chimichurri sauce, and Manchego cheese and Gorgonzola cr me with wilted spinach and garlic. The Portobello, with Grilled Chicken and Roast Red Peppers offers a happy medium.

Comfort food is essential with intriguing specials like Cornish game hens with fines herbes jus and multi-colored carrots, leeks, microgreens over garlic mashed potatoes; prawns with crabmeat and mornay sauce; mahi fingers in tempura batter with soy ginger, cucumber and wasabi dressing; fresh catch Cobia or Grouper round out the seafood

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selections. Fresh seafood comes at a premium in Florida. Open Ocean Aquaculture, a growing practice, provides a controlled environment with the benefits of the open ocean, keeping costs down while providing proper nutrition for fish and enabling viable future replenishment.

know about their food – where it is from, and how it has been raised as well as of course, how we prepare it."

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"Dining culture has evolved throughout my career," said Kevin. "People really want to