

Robert Burns fans honor poet's birth with feasting

By Judith Lerner
Special to The Eagle

Robert Burns, Scottish poet and lyricist, collector of folk songs, farmer and liver-of-life-to-the-fullest would have been 252 years old next Tuesday — if he had lived.

Burns was so beloved by his countrymen and supporters that in 1802, only a few years after his death at the age of 37, friends began celebrating his birthday with merriment, music, feasting, dancing and drinking.

Burns Night Suppers now happen all over the globe, and in much in the same manner whether in Scotland, Oregon, Japan or India.

Even the Berkshires will have Burns celebrations, from the proletariat to the most elegant.

Burns Night has become a fixture in Chatham, N.Y., since Tom Hope opened *Point o Gwro* (which means pint of beer in Welsh) near the Crandell movie theater.

"This will be our 10th Burns Night," said Hope, who is half Welsh and half Scottish. "We usually do it on the Saturday before which will be the 22nd this year."

Burns Night has a particular form, with traditional foods like haggis, neaps and tatties being menu mainstays.

Haggis is a kind of Scottish hash or pudding made of lamb parts, including shoulder, heart, liver, kidneys and lungs, mixed with oatmeal, onions, suet and seasonings.

These ingredients get stuffed into a casing, the best being a sheep's stomach, although modern artificial casings have crept into the process. The haggis then gets boiled until it is savory and delicious.

Don't laugh. It is not unlike a rich, tender meatloaf — Scottish lamb paté, if you will.

"I'll have the regular haggis, which I just ordered up from New Jersey," Hope said last week. "And I'll be doing a vegan haggis."

Hope's modern vegan version should let diners know what haggis tastes like.

"I make it with two kinds of oatmeal, mushrooms, carrots, onions, two kinds of nuts, two kinds of kidney beans, Marmite and lots of rosemary," he continued. "And I do it in a non-meat casing."

"I'll also be doing neaps and tatties, which is potatoes and rutabaga," he explained.

Burns Night suppers are about a lot more than just eating. There is a protocol with lots of piping of bagpipes,

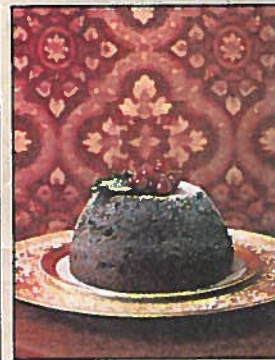


Courtesy photos

Blantyre in Lenox, above, will be one scene of a Burns Night supper next Tuesday. At far left, a dessert trifle at Perigee in South Lee and near left, a winter pudding at Blantyre.



Gregory Nestor



If you go ...

Blantyre
16 Blantyre Road, Lenox
(413) 637-3556
www.blantyre.com

Ann Brown, owner; Anthony Boi food and beverage manager; Christopher Brooks chef

First annual Burns Night Supper by reservation, Tuesday, starting at 6:30 p.m.

Three-course prix-fixe dinner with choice of scotch or wine pairing; \$160 per person plus 20-per cent gratuity and 6.25 per cent meals tax.

A 25-percent discount for any guest wearing a kilt.

Bagpipes, piano music, Scottish ballad, poetry reading, haggis and more.

Point o Gwro
36 Main St.
Chatham, N.Y.
(518) 392-2337

Tom Hope proprietor/bartender
Tenth annual Burns Night celebration Saturday from 6 p.m. Music and free dinner of haggis, neaps and tatties.

Perigee
1576 Pleasant St./Route 102
South Lee
(413) 394-4047

www.perigee-restaurant.com
Dawn LaRochelle, owner
Burns Night celebration Sunday, 5 to 7 p.m. by reservation. Festive Scottish menu, Robert Burns cocktail and poetry recitations. Kilt and tartan-wearing encouraged. Wear a kilt and drinks are on the house

singing and reading, and declaiming of Burns's poems and songs.

Guests are welcomed, a grace is said,

and then the haggis is presented.

Carried into the dining hall to a bagpipe fanfare, it is honored with a reading

of Burns's "Address to a Haggis," cut open and served all around.

"I'm trying to get a piper or a band," Hope said. "Be it a Scotsman or rock and roll."

Ann Brown, owner of Blantyre, the exclusive Lenox inn, is fired up about hosting a Burns Night celebration on the poet's birthday next Tuesday.

"This will be our 'First Annual Burns Night.' We're really excited. It will be Burns in a real Scottish country house," she confided. Blantyre was built by Robert Ward Paterson, a poor Scottish immigrant who made his fortune in America. It is named after a town in Scotland.

Brown has been studying some of the hundreds, actually millions, of Burns Night entries on the Internet and has learned a thing or two. She found that while the suppers have a tradition, interpreting that tradition can be somewhat of a free-for-all.

"It seems like everyone does their own thing," she laughed.

But she and chef Christopher Brooks and food and beverage manager Anthony Boi will offer a rich, traditional style.

"We want it to be an intimate Scottish evening. Like someone might have in their house," Brown said. "We have a bagpiper. We have scotch. The Burns Night is going to be very, very festive."

"At the beginning of the meal," she said, "everybody would be in the main hall. We will begin by bringing in the haggis, with pipes."

Then there will be more piping, poet-

BURNS, continued on D2