



Vendor Spotlight: The Pork Shack

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Michele Pulaski is bringing fresh, fun, and fast food to New Hope via The Pork Shack! This seasoned restaurateur is no rookie to the food industry, she was born into a foodie family. We got an up close look into her culinary background, restaurant concept, and menu in this exclusive interview.

Why did you decide to pursue a career in the restaurant business?

I was born into it, I'm a third generation restaurant owner. When it is part of your family, it's just what you do. My parents owned Gordon's, a diner at the Jersey Shore in the 60's. I was born above my parents' restaurant, raised there, and worked at my father's restaurant during summers when I had off from school.

Tell us about your career path, what is your culinary background?

That's a long history, so I will give you the condensed version. I have been working in the food industry since I was in high school. There is literally no position I haven't done, I was a busboy, dishwasher, and bartender. In my 35 years of experience, I've worked in bakeries, restaurants, even the coffee industry back when Starbucks was one store. My career has taken me out west and all around the country, until I

came back here and started my catering company, Dish.

What is the history behind The Pork Shack?

First, my Puerto Rican friend Ariel taught me to make Cuban style pork. You take fresh ham, stuff it with a special paste, and roast it. Her family was visiting from Puerto Rico and she was unable to cook for them, so she asked me to prepare their meal. They absolutely loved it! Years later I was working for another catering company and prepared the same pork, but this time as a sandwich for a staff meal. It was then that we discovered the delicious combination of pork, toppings, and sauce between pita bread. When I started my own catering company, it turned from a staff meal to a menu item we would prepare at parties. 18 years later, an opportunity arose to open up shop in Ferry Market. I took the chance and now we have been here for a little over a year.

Why did you open up shop in Ferry Market?

I live here in New Hope and when Ferry Market was being built everyone in town was talking about it. I called the market and told them I wanted to learn more about getting a spot. The market owners showed me their plans, made an affordable offer, and I became the second person to sign a lease. Ferry Market has allowed me to build strong feet and a good customer base, it's been fantastic. Kevin and Sherri are very generous to start things the way they did, they're taking such good care of New Hope.

What is your restaurant concept?

Growing up in 70's, our food was more natural and everything was made from scratch. I wanted to serve fresh food that is fast, fun, and real. Our meat is fresh, it comes from good farms with fair business owners. We use higher quality ingredients. All of our food is cooked in the market, including our sauces and soups. We cook our orders fast, you can get a freshly made lemonade, tater tots, and a sandwich in minutes.

You have a creative menu, what inspired it?

My father lived down the shore and owned businesses on the boardwalk. To me, the boardwalk is nostalgic, and I want people to have that same emotional connection when they

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eat. When I have one of our lemonades, it takes me back to the shore. Our tater tots make people happy, it's like being in fifth grade again. We treat Pork Shack like a boardwalk and have fun with our guests. People love seeing us because we're always happy and having a good time.

Where did your slogan “We’re Not Barbecue, and that’s Okay” come from?

People see pork and instantly think barbecue. Our pork is not barbecue, it's not smoked or slathered in a sweet sauce. We serve Cuban style pork from bone in fresh hams with the skin on. It's freshly roasted and pulled pork, which tastes good by itself, but you can add literally anything to it. We have so many sandwiches with pork and melted cheese, they're all delicious. Last week we had a French Pig sandwich with gruyere cheese, caramelized onions, and herb aioli, it outsold the Almost Famous.

Do you serve anything else besides pork?

There is so much you can do with our pork, put it on bread or tater tots or waffles, but we're not just pork. We also have a grilled cheese, called the Fromage à Trois. It's goat cheese, gruyere, and muenster with onions between two slices of crispy country white bread. This sandwich actually takes eight minutes to cook because of all the cheese. I love our name Pork Shack, and we're famous for our pork sandwiches, but we also have an incredible homemade tomato soup. It's not sweet like most places, it has sherry, cream, and butter. I designed it in a NY restaurant specifically to go with grilled cheese. It's a bright and acidic compliment to the richness of cheese, a perfect pairing.

Rumor has it that your dishes are quite customizable. Is that true?

Yes! I love it that people in the area are starting to create their own things. They will come in once and order off the menu, and then they start experimenting. You can add pork, pork roll, or bacon to anything for a fantastically large meal.

What is your favorite item on the menu?

Breakfast tots are hands down my favorite. When you break into the fried egg, it runs down the pork roll and tater tots into the sriracha and cheese sauce. People love our breakfast, we

serve it a little later in the day, but it is available all day long. I'm not sure what to call it, brunch? Brinner? People even come in at night for omelettes, which I think is kind of cool.

How does it feel to be a female chef crushing it in the food industry?

The female chefs I worked for in 80's paved the way for me, and I am paving the way for other women in the kitchen. I've worked for female leaders in the food industry and now I have strong women in my kitchen. One of my employees, Annie, is part of a new generation of women dominating the field. I think it's great, Annie is a powerhouse who shows up early, wants to create new things, cleans up after herself, and works hard. Women are high energy, organized, and get the job done. We don't mess around.

What is your next big project?

This is a beta shop, we definitely want to have other locations. Our problem is that it is hard to find qualified employees. Cooking takes a certain skill set and finesse. Good cooks are in high demand and difficult to find. It makes it hard to find good help, there are so many restaurants looking for skilled cooks.

What do you enjoy most about Pork Shack?

It's great to see people's instantaneous reactions, the response is always great. I love catering, but it is tedious, long, and hard work. It's usually for a very emotional situation, like a wedding, and I don't get to see people's reactions until the end. At The Pork Shack, I get instant gratification.

Next time you're in New Hope, hoof it over to The Pork Shack to try their soulful cooking. They are serving nostalgic classics such as boardwalk lemonade, with imaginative sandwiches featuring much more than their delicious slow roasted pork. Don't forget to try their breakfast, which is served all day, every day. Just one trip to The Pork Shack will make you go hog wild!