

Chef Paul Federico...Now that's Italian!

Reprint of article from the Sun Journal Sunday on March 24, 2010

Sun Journal, Lewiston, Maine, Sunday, March 21, 2010

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eats/Harvest Hill Farms/in the kitchen

Discovering the essence of the perfect meatball

BY T.S. CHAMBERLAND
Staff Writer

Meatballs might look like an easy offering to make, but the secret to making really good ones has always eluded me. That is, until Paul Federico, head chef at Harvest Hill Farms and the new Farm House Pizza and Deli in Mechanic Falls, shared his family's meatball recipe. Just a few ingredients and a simple technique stood between me and fantastic meatballs. Utterly amazing.

In the back kitchen at Farm House Pizza and Deli, located on Route 26, Federico began mixing ingredients. He explained that hamburger with a higher fat content enhances the flavor and tenderness of the meatballs. He recommends using 75 percent lean hamburger, like the all-natural, range-fed beef from Harvest Hill Farms. Pork, beef and free-range chickens are available for sale from the farm. They deliver everything they sell throughout Oxford, Minot, Mechanic Falls and Poland, including pre-packaged meats and chicken, as well as wine, ice cream and other desserts.

Hamburger, pork, a little seasoning, egg and fresh bread crumbs gently mixed by hand make up the entire recipe for meatballs, which Paul says he'd put to the test against anyone's for flavor. Simple can be delicious.

"I'm a firm believer that less is more," said Federico. "Just a few good flavors is better than trying to dress it up with 10 different items."

To get a soft, looser meatball, Federico said he does not over mix the ingredients. Over-mixing and rolling too tightly can lead to a tough meatball, not a tender one. He also said the type and amount of bread crumbs added is crucial. Using a Cuisinart, Federico makes his own fresh bread crumbs out of Italian bread. As for amount, too much dries the mixture out; not enough hurts the flavor. "When I first started in Portland with my mother and grandmother, they taught me everything," said Federico of his first restaurant venture.

One of the things his mother and grandmother taught him was a little trick to make rolling the meatballs easier: dip the mixture in water to keep the meat from sticking to his hands as he rolls.

"I don't over-roll it; just enough to make it into a ball," said Federico. "Makes a nice, soft meatball."

In a cast iron pan, over medium-high heat, Federico placed about 25 meatballs in two tablespoons of heated olive oil and cooked them for two to three minutes, until they brown, before turning them over and browning the other side. Federico said he only partially cooks the meatballs before adding them to his sauce (also a long-time family recipe). There, they continue to cook for more than four hours as the sauce simmers. (See recipe for cooking the meatballs without sauce.)

Federico says that other than the produce they purchase from local vendors, Harvest Hills will soon be almost totally self-sufficient; they are currently working on making all their bread in-house at the Poland location. Visit them online at <http://www.harvesthillfarms.com/index.html> for more information.

video/Watch chef Paul Federico prepare his delicious Federico family meatballs at www.sunjournal.com



RUSS DILLINGHAM/SUN JOURNAL
Paul Federico, head chef at Harvest Hill Farms and the new Farm House Pizza and Deli in Mechanic Falls, partially cooks his meatballs prior to finishing them off in his tried-and-true sauce.

hints/ from chef Federico



- When rolling meatballs, use a little water to keep the mixture from sticking to your hands.

- Don't roll meatballs too tightly, this will make them tough. Roll them lightly, until they are just keeping their ball shape.

- You will know when the oil in a fry pan is hot enough when it spreads from the center of the pan.

- Add some flair to your spaghetti sauce with boneless pork ribs.

- Fresh bread crumbs can be made using an Italian bread loaf and a Cuisinart.

recipe/meatballs



Federico Family Meatballs

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| 1 1/4 cup 75 percent lean hamburger | 1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil |
| 3/4 cup ground pork | 1 teaspoon salt |
| 1 tablespoon Parmesan cheese | 1/4 teaspoon pepper |
| 1 tablespoon minced garlic | 1 egg |
| 1 tablespoon parsley | 1 cup fresh bread crumbs |

Mix all ingredients except bread crumbs in a bowl with hands until just blended. Add bread crumbs and fold lightly until just mixed.

Place two tablespoons of water in a baking pan, scoop out meatball mix with a one-inch scoop and drop each scoopful into the wet pan. Then hand shape each wet scoopful into balls, gently rolling on the high parts of your palm. The water keeps the mixture from sticking to your hands. Heat two tablespoons of

olive oil in a pan over medium-high heat. Cook meatballs two to three minutes on each side, then add to sauce and continue cooking for two to four hours. Not making spaghetti? Continue cooking over medium-high heat for another 5 to 6 minutes until done or bake them at 350 degrees in a preheated oven for 10 to 15 minutes.

Next week: She's known for many things. Her inn. Her energy. Her community involvement. But her breakfasts? In Jan Barrett's NEW kitchen at the Ware Street Inn in Lewiston (husband Mike built it), where she takes time from her new catering business to whip up some cranberry oatmeal pancakes. Yum.