



Creativity Reborn Locally

Executive Chef Jeremy Ashby
AZUR restaurant & patio

I came to a reassuring realization a few weeks ago. In the midst of the economic turmoil this past year, I began to observe a

rebirth of community spirit.

Like many other businesses, **AZUR** endlessly ponders how to cut costs, lower prices, afford advertising, schedule promotions and implement services that help to set us apart. For the restaurant industry, increases in hospitality make the restaurant more desirable. I knew that we, **AZUR**, were already 100% dedicated to our clientele, so my question was, "For God's sake, how do we survive this economy?"

The crisis demanded that we change, or I should say, that the *industry* change. Cutting cost was essential, so I had to look for ways to "trim the fat" and still maintain a grand ambience and gourmet menu. I found myself looking for simplicity in the finer ingredients. This included seasonality and day by day purchasing of only the necessities. A return to simplicity and efficiency seemed to coincide with the way people across the country were beginning to live their lives. (Tight resources and skepticism about any impending economic upswing will force one to become much more frugal!)

When I purchase food, I look for high quality ingredients that will yield total satisfaction among diners. It seemed that the logical answer was to get "back to the basics." I started turning to the local farmers and cheese makers, the local aquaculture and bread makers. And I discovered that the "on demand" services I required--those which I had been trying to obtain from larger corporate suppliers--were always right here in my own community, literally right outside my backdoor.

Then, as we invited in more and more of our local farmers and extended hospitality to our immediate neighbors, something amazing happened. A genuine sense of community began to grow, a real sense of collective effort and satisfaction that began to flow through the back door and into the kitchen, and then from the kitchen straight into the dining area. We were helping our community while helping ourselves. We were fulfilling our needs more intelligently and taking better care of our customers at the same time.

Not surprisingly, the Kentucky Proud movement has become an even more essential part of **AZUR**, and we are absolutely delighted to share our local foods with our guests. When I start a conversation with our customers about the fresh food on their plates, and when I mention that it came from just down the road, I sense a real connection, a true interest. The customers can feel the satisfaction and pride in my voice. The conversation continues and I make new friends and satisfied guests who return time after time. I have discovered that everyone is always looking for something new and fulfilling and I found it in our partnership with our farmers and local businesses that depend on one another.

We have the unique opportunity over the course of the next several months, with so many visitors coming to our community for the Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games 2010, to share Kentucky's best in hospitality and local products. In particular, a dinner series called Cookin' in the Bluegrass will partner sixteen local chefs with chefs from the James Beard Foundation to showcase Kentucky dishes and the diversity of our local products including meats, cheeses, produce and, yes, bourbon.

From economic adversity, chef creativity has returned to the Bluegrass and I am pleased with the results. As we return to the origins of cooking with our local products and better use of available resources, we discover that something that had been lost, that sense of community, of a shared endeavor. Ironically (but happily), inspiration is reborn and we return to what we know!



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Chefs That Sizzle