



"My grandparents opened a restaurant in Florida the day I was born," says Evening Star Cafe chef Jim Jeffords.

Jim Jeffords: A Southern statement

By Alexandra Greeley
Special to The Washington Examiner

Some young chefs have all the luck, and Jim Jeffords is one of them. Currently the executive chef of Evening Star Cafe, Jeffords spent four and a half years working under one of D.C.'s most outstanding chefs, Eric Ziebold, executive chef of CityZen. "He teaches cooks how to cook and how always to be thinking ahead," he explained. "You have to be four steps ahead or you will always be a step behind," was one of his favorites. He gives you recipes plus freedom, and tells you how he wants things to taste."

A native of Georgia, Jeffords can point to earlier culinary influences in his life, perhaps not as formative, but that planted the seeds of his food passion. "I grew up in the very southern end of Georgia," he said, "the agricultural area where there is lots of farming." That was in Moultrie, where his family owned a farm. Young Jeffords helped tend to the corn, soy and peanuts, and at large family dinners, Jeffords enjoyed his grandmother's pot roast, deviled eggs and peanuts.

But for the business of the culinary world, his grandparents also played another key role. "My grandparents opened a restaurant in Florida the day I was born," he said. "It was very casual, and no one had had any restaurant experience prior to opening it. So I spent a lot of time down there growing up." Cooking for the restaurant was his first professional cooking experience, he adds, and he discovered he really liked the kitchen subculture.

Later, working as a bartender during his college years, Jeffords decided to go to culinary school.

What is your comfort food?

One thing I like to do if it's late, is to open the refrigerator, put salsa on one chip, and sit there and eat that. But other than that, I love to make pasta. I love to make Bolognese and have it at home. ... I like a lot of Italian-influenced foods; I traveled to Italy and biked through wine country.

What has been the greatest influence on your cooking?

Eric Ziebold, on a daily basis, and his seeing everything and telling you things like "a little more salt," and showing you how things come together correctly.

What is your favorite ingredient?

Salt. Aside from that, garlic. I love garlic and I like a lot of spices like paprika, cumin and smoked paprika.

Do you have a favorite cookbook?

"Larousse Gastronomique." It is an extremely old, large cookbook, but if you want to reference any type of food item, there is something in that book that uses it. I find inspiration when using it.

What's in your fridge?

I have beef tongue in brine, which my wife hates. Yogurt. I don't do much cooking at home. Grapefruit, V8 juice, and that's about it.

If you go

Evening Star Cafe

- » **Where:** 2000 Mount Vernon Ave., Alexandria
- » **Info:** 703-549-5051
- » **Hours:** Lunch, 11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Friday; dinner, 5:30 to 10 p.m. Monday to Thursday, 5:30 to 11 p.m. Friday and Saturday, 5:30 to 9:30 p.m. Sunday; brunch, 11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Saturday, 10 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Sunday

After graduating from high school, Jeffords spent two years working in Montana, before he moved to Vermont to attend the New England Culinary Institute. After graduation, Jeffords moved to Boston, where chef Chris Parsons hired him to work in his three-star seafood restaurant, Catch.

After only a short stint in Boston, Jeffords moved down to D.C., where as luck would have it, Ziebold took him in as an intern. "I wanted to come further south," he said, "because that is the style of cooking I knew growing up." And as Jeffords recounts, that experience really shaped him as a chef. "I picked up the basic understanding of flavor profiles. Eric has raw talent when creating dishes," he said. "He is big into the simplicity of design, yet creating something very exciting — nothing ever looked flat."

Capitalizing on his education and on his CityZen experience, Jeffords revels in Evening Star's casual atmosphere and his freedom to infuse the menu with Southern-style eats: shrimp and grits and buttermilk-fried chicken are menu stars. Indeed, Jeffords describes his signature dish as pan-roasted duck breast with hazelnut dirty rice with spring onions and artichokes.

The Vine Guy » Scott Greenberg

A little of this, a little of that

Leaves sprouting on trees, cherry blossoms in bloom and enough pollen in the air to fill a stadium all combine to announce the arrival of spring in Washington. But in our household, there is a different harbinger that heralds the arrival of the vernal equinox: wine samples. A lot of wine samples.

Each spring, my wife and I are inundated with wine samples from PR firms, winemakers and vineyards from around the world. During the height of "sample season," our neighbors regard us with a mixture of curiosity and wariness as the boxes pile up on the porch.

But the problem with receiving so many samples is that we have to try them. It's an obligation we have to the nice people who navigate the web of legal red tape in order to get the wines to us. And just as important, we owe it to our readers to try each sample, just in case something wonderful pops up. So each week, we open the boxes and attempt to categorize the wines into groups or themes. The problem is that sometimes there are a few really interesting wines that don't fall into any specific topic or theme. That's when we decide to write a little of this, and a little of that. Retail prices are approximate.

One of the oldest vineyard sites in Australia is home to Chateau Tanunda. Their **2010 Chateau Tanunda Grand Barossa Riesling (\$14)** features flavors of lemon, lime and pineapple that blanket the tongue from front to back. Bright acidity keeps the fruit in balance on the refreshing finish. Hints of tropical fruit and just a whisper of sweetness on the finish make this wine a good choice to pair with spicier fare. **QPR 7.5**

According to the label, locals call the area where the **2010 Ca' Montini Pinot Grigio Trentino (\$15)** is made Valfredda, which means "cold valley." This cooler climate allows the fruit to mature more slowly and develop into a wine that possesses a lovely nose filled with scents of tropical fruit and lemon-lime citrus. Bright flavors of mango, papaya and topical fruit echo the nose and lead to a long finish with lively acidity. Chill it down for a wonderful aperitif on a warm summer evening. **QPR 7.5**

Bordeaux wines do not always have to be expensive to be enjoyable. The **2008 Mission St. Vincent Red Bordeaux Blend Reserve (\$20)** is a case in point. With pleasant scents of blackberry and earthy spices and flavors of black plum, cassis and espresso, it is just the right everyday wine to serve with beef stew or soft cheeses. **QPR 8**

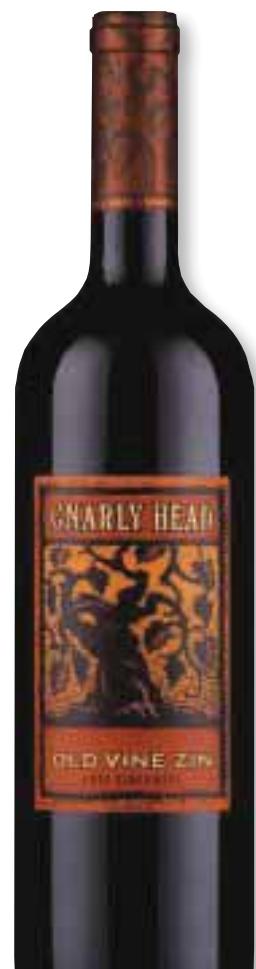
Another delicious value from Italy is the **2007 Arnaldo Caprai Montefalco Rosso (\$23)**. This

medium-bodied red wine is a blend of sangiovese, merlot and sargentino grapes. Juicy flavors of red plum, dark strawberries and ripe black cherries hit the tongue upfront while waves of dried herbs and vanilla coast in on the charming finish. Perfect with antipasto or hard cheeses. **QPR 8**

Not every big red wine in California comes from Napa Valley. The **2010 Gnarly Head Authentic Red (\$12)** hails from Lodi and is a hearty red wine that possesses generous flavors of black cherry, blueberry and mocha notes on a well-balanced stage. Characteristic black pepper spice plays out on the powerful finish. Try it with barbecue ribs. **QPR 8.5**

The **2003 Taltarni Cephas (\$35)** from Victoria, Australia, is a big wine looking for a cold night. A blend of mostly shiraz with a touch of cabernet sauvignon, it is a rich, decadent red wine with loads of blackberries, dark plum fruit and cassis upfront. Dried herbs and a hint of black pepper are featured on the long, impressive finish. Perfect with leg of lamb. **QPR 9**

Note: QPR is a rating system that compares the quality a wine delivers relative to the price. A QPR of 10 is considered an excellent value.



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