

Southern Comfort & SOPHISTICATION

By Lexi Holian



When it comes to dining out on the Outer Banks, it's not hard to see why Red Sky Cafe is a favorite among locals and visitors. The mainstay on Duck Road brims with Southern charm, from the intimate string lighting to the distressed wooden barn wall in the dining room, and Chef Wes Stepp's cutting-edge coastal cuisine just has to be tried to be believed.

But rivaling the beautiful restaurant setting is the comfort of your own home or vacation rental, because with Red Sky's Chefs on Call, you don't actually have to leave the house to indulge in all the fresh, local fare that makes the Outer Banks so special.

After a long day at the beach (or if you just don't feel like wrangling the kids for a dinner outing), a Red Sky Personal Chef will come to your home, cook a meal for your group and clean up the kitchen afterward. You can select from a variety of delectable menus available from Chefs on Call – from North Carolina pork barbecue to fresh, local seafood or prime beef dishes. The variety and flavors are second to none.

"We are the guests that come over with the food," says Chef Wes, noting that the experience is more personal than catering. "We become part of the family for the night."

A figure in the Outer Banks restaurant scene for more than 25 years – and a celebrity chef on a regional NBC TV station – Chef Wes is known throughout North Carolina and Virginia for his culinary vision. Many remember him as the head chef at Kelly's Restaurant and Tavern, but his passion for food and the Outer Banks flourished with Red Sky Cafe, which he named after he purchased the restaurant by putting his own twist on a well-known adage: "Red Sky at night, gourmet's delight."

When Red Sky Cafe first opened, he created Chefs on Call both to offer an alternative to dining out and so that visitors could experience some local "flavor" in the form of the chefs. "My chefs will add to the experience with their unique personalities," Chef Wes says, recalling some of the stories the chefs have told families over dinner about living on the Outer Banks and how they spend the off-season. "We give a taste of Outer Banks character."

Chefs on Call can travel to your home or vacation rental property even if you're staying in South Nags Head or on the four-wheel-drive beaches of Carova (where trying to eat out at a restaurant can often be an excursion in itself). They can accommodate groups as large as 50, sending additional chefs and even servers and bartenders if needed, but there will always be a personal touch that makes the dining experience memorable.

When planning a dinner with Chefs on Call, you don't have to follow Red Sky's restaurant menu (unless you would like to!). Red Sky already has sample menus you can select from – even mix and match! The fresh, creative dishes can be specialized for your group, and children are always taken into consideration. If you would like to have filet mignon and seared Gulf Stream tuna in the dining room while the kids enjoy chicken tenders and macaroni and cheese in front of a movie, you can do it.

Chef Wes himself might recommend some local Outer Banks seafood prepared

with a contemporary Southern twist. His signature shrimp and grits – a favorite on the menu at Red Sky Cafe – is made with succulent North Carolina shrimp sauteed in a house-made Cajun cream sauce with bacon that is served over a Redneck Risotto.

"My style of cooking is a Southern-nouveau technique," he says. "I take some of our Southern, classic dishes and give them a facelift for the new generation."

In any case, your personal chef will prepare elegant, artful presentations of food – the likes of which you would find if you were dining at Red Sky Cafe – while you simply relax with your family.

For those who prefer to visit the restaurant itself, Red Sky Cafe welcomes guests into a cozy dining room where the open kitchen is the highlight. You can regularly see Chef Wes at work in the kitchen, and because the restaurant is family owned and operated, you might also run into one of his daughters, who oversee the restaurant as general manager and assistant manager.

During lunch and dinner, a fusion of global and local cuisines presents itself in dishes like the fried green tomatoes topped with goat cheese and balsamic reduction, the Chicken Bianca Pasta with sauteed mushrooms and, of course, the shrimp and grits.

Along with his chef-inspired coastal cuisine, Chef Wes is also known for his aggressive business spirit and is always looking for opportunities to expand his offerings. The multi-faceted business built around Red Sky Cafe also includes special event catering and the popular program, *Tastefully Fit*.

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Merging his interests of food and fitness, Chef Wes came up with *Tastefully Fit* to encourage healthy eating while still allowing for creativity in the kitchen. The program's cookbook outlines shopping for ingredients, food preparation and recipes for five to six small meals per day. (And you can actually find a dish from *Tastefully Fit* on the menu at Red Sky Cafe every day.)

"Lean, clean cooking – that's what it is," he says, noting that the goal is to have fun while eating healthy.

Along with living and breathing the program himself, Chef Wes has traveled all over North Carolina and Virginia to bring *Tastefully Fit* to businesses with wellness programs and to speak at seminars to teach people how to make the plan part of their everyday lifestyle.

At the center of everything he does is Chef Wes's love for food and hospitality. He says, "By staying active in the restaurant as I do, it sharpens my passion. And in a competitive culinary scene like the Outer Banks, the better the food gets around me, the better my food has to get."



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