

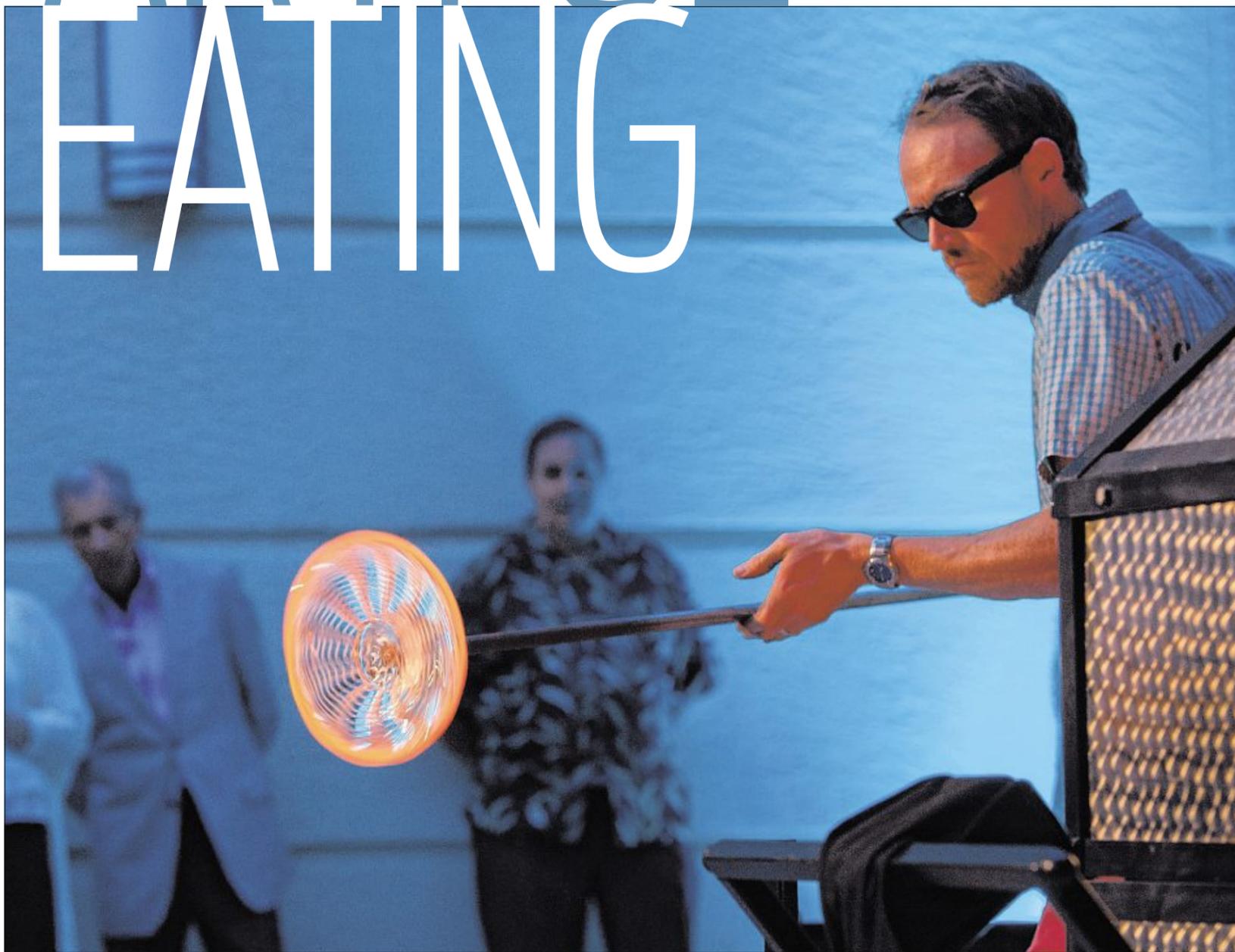
Neapolitan

SUNDAY BEST | CLASSIFIED

■ **Techno Buddy** How to make dealing with customer service less painful. **10D**

Sunday, February 28, 2016

ARTFUL EATING



GREGG PACHKOWSKI/SPECIAL TO THE DAILY NEWS (2)

Glassblowing artist Conrad Williams spins a blowpipe to give his piece its shape as he demonstrates his craft during Dinner with Artists on Feb. 16 at the von Liebig Art Center in Naples. This month's event featured Williams and chef Greg Shapiro, owner of Tastebuds Catering.

■ Naples Art Association pairs visual, culinary inspiration in successful dinner series

Despite a temperature that barely brushed 70 degrees, the heat was on at von Liebig Art Center on Feb. 16. There was fire blazing in a chunky, chimneyed portable kiln that yielded glass in melty fluorescent orbs from its contact with 2,000 degrees of heat.

In another corner, fuel cans breathed blue warmth on the bottoms of containers where encased filets, gently cooked sous vide style, waited. They would be sliced in thin waves, nestled in polenta, topped with a bourbon-barrel sauce and flanked by a small coronet of root vegetables.

The occasion was another "Dinner with Artists" evening with Naples Art Association, a mashup of visual and culinary adventures that has been drawing visitors and natives for two years now. Who knew a platter poses as a hot-glass vase until the glassblower's last careful twirls? Who knew strawberries would taste so delicious pickled?

"These aren't fundrais-

ers," declared Executive Director Aimee Schlehr at the Feb. 16 dinner, spread out under a canopy of lights on the center's back terrace. (The dinners alternate between it and the Veranda E garden at Hotel Escalante.)

The idea, as Schlehr and series organizer Maureen Christianson have said, is to raise awareness of the work between inspiration and art and to showcase the level of local talent, both visual and culinary, in Naples.

Schlehr would repeat it several times during the evening: "We appreciate your support of the arts just by being here. We hope you support our local artists, too."

The mantra was working. Williams' art piece was bought before it even cooled Feb. 16.

Local chefs share the glow, too. Greg Shapiro, owner of Tastebuds Catering, explained each course, which had its own visual art: "He does it (art) with glass. I love the art of food." The pickling, he explained,

See ART, 2D



Chef Greg Shapiro prepares vanilla-infused sugar glass for his dessert during Dinner with Artists.



HARRIET HEITHAUS



IF YOU GO DINNER WITH ARTISTS

What: An evening of dinner, demonstrations and talks by both an artist and a chef on their work and what they're offering that night; artist Ran Adler and Chef Bryan Sutton are featured for the upcoming event

When: 5:30 p.m. April 20
Where: Veranda E at the Escalante, 290 Fifth Ave S., Naples

Tickets: \$100; early reservations required because of limited seating
To buy: -239-262-6517
Information: <http://bit.ly/1TbwKw>

naplesnews.com

Aimee Schlehr discusses "Dinner with Artists."

ART
from ID

was to tone down the strawberries' sweetness as a foil for pink nuggets of hamachi crudo, a seasoned raw Japanese fish.

Attendees are limited to around 50, so there is an intimate flavor. There's also a moment for everyone to ask his or her question or get a little personal time with the guest artist or chef.

LOOK, DON'T TOUCH

Williams clips the top off the glowing glass, pounding as it cools to put a base on a generously sized clear platter with a cobalt rim. A milky white ribbon of glass wriggles through it, incorporating frills.

"Will we be able to touch it later?" asked a fascinated guest.

"Only if you have a lot of gauze for your hands," he warns. The shaped glass is still 1,000 degrees; it must cool so gently that an annealer — a cooling case — will hold it overnight, slowly lowering it degree by degree.

His wife, Erin Dougherty, could easily be mistaken for a guest in her black evening dress. But, even in high heels, she deftly eases glass balls into the furnace on a long rod and lowers them, each glowing with 2,000 degrees heat, onto a bench to roll into symmetry. She's a magician's assistant now, but has her own career as a professional photographer, as visitors to the Artis—Naples galleries can see this month.

Williams, a former intern in the studios of acclaimed glass artist Dale Chihuly, is proud of his portable furnace and annealer.

"We can go places and give people more access who might not be able to have this otherwise. We can get children involved," he said later. He had just done a particularly rewarding on-site demonstration for a group of preschoolers who created their own



GREGG PACHKOWSKI/SPECIAL TO THE DAILY NEWS

Chef Greg Shapiro, right, chats with Jerry and Wendie Smith, of Naples, FL and Burr Ridge, Ill., during the "Dinner with the Artist" event at the von Liebig Art Center in Naples on Feb. 16. This month's event featured glassblowing artist Conrad Williams and chef Greg Shapiro the owner of Tastebuds Catering.

glass globes.

Questions flow; cellphones click. Onlookers drift in and out in a slow-motion dance, testing a camera angle, plucking a glass of wine from the nearby bar and watching Williams pound glowing glass into a base shape.

"It gives you insights into the order of how an art piece is created. And it gives you an interpersonal connection with that artist. You bond with the pieces when you understand what goes into them," said Carla Bogart, a Newsbank employee who had come with her friend, Julie Conwell, a fellow Naples resident.

Once the urnlike shape has

been blown and swirled into its final, flattened shape, attention moves to the tables, where Schlehr's welcome precedes social time. Then Shapiro explains what the guests are eating and why he made it.

The menu looks as well as tastes springlike, with a few guilty pleasures: squares of Shapiro's thick house-made bacon and pumpernickel croutons studding a tarragon vinegar-dressed frisee salad.

"I hope you like the amuse bouche (the appetizer of fish, strawberry and pea shoot). If you didn't, tell me — or tell me much later," Shapiro said, teasing the crowd.

AN IRRESISTIBLE PAIR

Most attendees interviewed say the pairing is the appeal. Conversation flowed among new friends, and there were single-person pilgrimages to both artist and chef to ask more questions, express more ideas.

"I come here for your food and art," said Ena McGrattan, of Dublin, Ireland, a part-time resident and one of a number who has been to several "Dinner with Artists" events. She was especially excited about the glassblowing topic, she said: "We have Waterford (crystal glass) in Ireland."

She was about to see Shapiro's own glassblowing skills. The chef flamed a vanilla-

fused sugar "glass" to create a sweet dessert crust.

Among the crowd watching that finale was Tony Canike, a retiree from New Hope, Pennsylvania. Canike has been spending winters in Naples for 13 years, and attending functions at the von Liebig Art Center for at least the last four of them.

"I just love these events," he said.

Harriet Howard Heithaus covers the arts for the Daily News. If you know of an unusual arts story, contact Harriet at harriet.heithaus@naplesnews.com; 239-213-6091; on Twitter at NDN_HarrietHeit or Instagram: flascribe.

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