

Small town restaurant with big city food

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(PETER HVIZDAK - NEW HAVEN REGISTER)

Jared B. Schulefand, Home restaurant owner and chef, celebrates the fifth anniversary of his restaurant on Main Street in Branford.

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BRANFORD » It was a steamy Thursday night in July 2012 at the newest restaurant on Main Street. The phone was ringing. Jared Schulefand, owner of Home, picked it up.

That the boxed picnic the caller was ordering would soon become an essential for concert-goers attending the Jazz on the Green summer series is just one of the reasons that Home will be celebrating its fifth anniversary starting on Tuesday, May 23.

Another is Schulefand, the former Modern Apizza busboy who honed his gastronomic chops in the esteemed culinary arts program at Johnson & Wales University, then spent five years rising through the ranks at the four-star, four-diamond resort Chatham Bars Inn on Cape Cod. All along, he was refining an image of the restaurant he would one day own.

"I've always enjoyed making people feel at home," said the affable, 34-year-old on a recent afternoon, as strains of soft jazz filtered through the soft leather chairs and couches in the front room.

"I wanted to create a place that specialized in freshly cooked meals and provided all the comforts of home without the need to cook, set the table, and wash the dishes."

To hear Branford's Troy Gunther tell it, he's succeeded. "Jared introduced himself the first week," said the nurse at Shoreline VNA who regularly orders take out when she has a long shift and "needs good healthy food." So did the wait staff, she said, including Steve, Jared's father, who tends bar.

The accommodation doesn't end there. The restaurant has a gluten-free menu and features a peanut-free



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Jared B. Schulefand, Home restaurant owner and chef, far right, talks with customers Eleanor Feroletto of Fairfield, left, and her daughters Kristine Feroletto of Alexandria, Va., center, and Lisa Feroletto of Branford, right, at the restaurant on Main Street in Branford.

kitchen. For someone with food allergies like Trish Blair of Canton, "Home is a god-send."

Above all, though, it's Schulefand's culinary ingenuity that has distinguished Home since its doors opened in May 2012—and not just the boxed picnics. The Hamden native overhauls the menu every six months. "We keep staples like The Home Burger, General Tso's Brussels Sprouts, and the Roasted Tomato Soup, but otherwise it's really like opening a new restaurant," Schulefand said.

The challenge is to keep it within the season. On June 6, what had been a French Onion Grilled Cheese since Dec. 4 will likely be a whipped goat cheese spread, for example.

"It's exciting because guests look forward to the change," Schulefand said, adding that Home will be doing a tapas menu of favorites

from the last 10 menus during its anniversary week; the restaurant is inviting Home diners to specify their favorites dishes on its Facebook page.

"We get a lot of people who will always eat the same thing at other places—you know, the chicken parm people," he said. "Then they come here and they tell me they have no problem trying something new. They trust me. They know it's going to work."

That's backed up by Shoreline Times readers who voted Home as the restaurant with the Best American Cuisine in 2016. Likewise, The Advocate, which in recent years has recognized the establishment with the distinctive brick exterior as the best local restaurant, best American and Continental restaurant, and the restaurant with the best bar.

Not to mention Home regulars who, according to Schulefand, come from as far

away as Hartford, as well as all corners of the state. There are also those that plan their summer trips around a meal at Home. "They stop on their way to Cape Cod," he said, "and a month later, they're back on their way home to New York."

Said long-time employee Sade Laroque, formerly the events manager: people "feel the homey vibe and come back again and again," and for private events as well. "Someone came for her rehearsal dinner and then had her baby shower here."

In the end, it was Troy Gunther, the nurse who's been there from the start, who most neatly summed up the reason for its success.

"Home has the feel of a small-town restaurant with big city food," she said.

Home is at 1114 Main St. Branford. homerestaurantct.com, 203-483-5896.