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Chef Adds Culinary Flair to Mason Inn's Boxwoods

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By [Dave Andrews](#)

The Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York City has the Bull and Bear. The Mason Inn Conference Center and Hotel in Fairfax has Boxwoods.

Boxwoods is the full-service restaurant at the new inn, which recently opened on Mason's Fairfax Campus. Though the inn is fully operational and has already hosted a number of guests, the official grand opening will take place on July 22.

But you don't need to wait any longer to taste the offerings at Boxwoods. After a few weeks of menu refinement and meal tastings, it opened to the public on July 6. The 175-seat restaurant includes a combination of booth and table seating, as well as a 12-person Presidential Dining Room.



Boxwoods, the full-service restaurant inside the new Mason Inn Conference Center and Hotel, is now open for business. Photo by Nicolas Tan

The restaurant features contemporary décor and uses a color palette of earth tones similar to the university's colors of green and gold. To further blur the line between the indoors and outdoors, patrons will enjoy floor-to-ceiling windows that create a bright daytime ambiance.

All it takes is one bite from any dish served at Boxwoods to know that this isn't an average eatery. A carefully crafted menu of "culinary delights" awaits, with selections such as the Crab Cakes Benedict, Mushroom Fricassee or the Mason "Green" Plate Special, which is a sustainable and eco-friendly dish offered daily.

But behind every great menu, there's a chef who meticulously puts it all together. The architect behind the menu at Boxwoods is Executive Chef Mark Geis.

"It's a great opportunity here at Boxwoods," says Geis, who whittled hundreds of recipes down to the list of finalists that appear in the Boxwoods menu.

"We've been given free rein to use as much local produce as we can, and we're partnering with local fish suppliers. Everything is sustainable, and our meats are free-range."

The Boxwoods concept is to bring back traditional kitchen techniques. Rather than buying individual cuts of meat from outside butchers, the chef buys the whole muscle meats and trims the cuts right in the kitchen. And instead of buying vacuum-packed, pre-cut fish, Geis prefers to buy the whole fish so that it can be prepared entirely on site.

Geis has been working in the culinary industry for more than 20 years, mostly in the United Kingdom. He has catered for many high-



Chef Mark Geis is committed to buying produce locally and using free-range meats for Boxwoods menu items. Photo by Nicolas Tan

and menu ideas.



Geis takes pride in his past experiences living in different places and learning about unusual cuisine.

His expertise also covers pastries. As a trained pastry chef, he places special attention on his dessert items. "We want to wow people with some really nice desserts," he says.

From the Chocolate and Raspberry Mousse with sweet vanilla biscuits, to the Apple, Peach and Cream Cheese Enchilada with vanilla-chocolate custard, each dessert at Boxwoods is baked from scratch.

The Boxwoods staff of 13 cooks has already had opportunities to flex their muscles. With responsibility for catering affairs in the inn's conference center as well, the staff has provided meals for multiple large-ballroom functions and received encouraging reviews.

"Just recently, a couple came in to sample our menu, and from that, decided to book a party for 120 people for next week," Geis notes.

At this rate of increasing clientele, Geis will soon begin to feel as if he's back at the Olympic Village.

Boxwoods is open seven days a week, serving breakfast from 6:30 to 10:30 a.m., lunch from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., and dinner from 5 to 9 p.m. Free parking is available to hotel and restaurant guests on the south side of the hotel behind the conference center.

To make meal reservations, call 703-865-4638. Online reservations through Open Table will soon be available. More details and menus can be viewed on the [Boxwoods website](#).

profile clients, such as Queen Elizabeth, Prince Charles and Margaret Thatcher. He was even executive chef at the Athlete's Village during the Beijing Olympics in 2008.

"I've been around a bit," Geis says, "but Beijing would have to be the highlight [of my career]. It was phenomenal to see the city, while cooking and learning new skills. It became a bit of a blur at times — at one point we did about 40,000 meals in a 24-hour period, feeding not only the athletes but the staff as well."

Aramark, a provider of facilities management services that manages the Mason Inn, has been Geis' employer for more than six years. Prior to joining the inn, Geis worked for Aramark in London, overseeing all the restaurants the company operated in the metropolitan area and implementing new concepts

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