

## The North's Most Fruitful Industry



Don Nugent,  
CEO of Graceland Fruit.

Photo by Andy Wakeman

### The players and products that rule the Cherry Capital

By Gary Hoffman

**REGION** – The cherry, that small, juicy ball of perfection, keeps stirring its processing industry to greater and greater feats.

Processors can send a frozen shipment across country without losing a single cherry to spoilage. They can put a 1-pound sugar cap on 5 pounds of frozen cherries before storage – and make it impossible for the fruit to oxidize and turn color.

The IQF (individually quick freeze) process, can freeze a load of cherries, piece by piece. The cherries are put on a conveyor “and when they reach the other end, they are like marbles,” says Nikki Rothwell, coordinator of the

Northwest Michigan Horticultural Research Station near Suttons Bay. “You can measure out a cup of them because they don’t stick together.”

The time is long past when it was enough to transform cherries into canned pie filling – in part because people aren’t eating pies anymore. The relaxed sit-down family dinner complete with dessert has become a thing of the past. And that trend away from desserts has driven down the demand for the tart (baking) cherries that are mostly grown in the

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Contact Jill Niemi at 231.995.1761  
or [jniemi@arbor.edu](mailto:jniemi@arbor.edu).

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## "My night at the James Beard House"

TC's Trattoria Stella executive chef Myles Anton recently was invited to cook in the esteemed New York City kitchen of the "dean of American cookery," the late James Beard. Anton shares his story with TCBN writer Lynn Geiger.

*Invited is the key word here. You can't ask. You can't apply. You must be invited. It's the main stage for chefs and winemakers around the world, and on May 13 Anton took over the kitchen and performed the meal of a lifetime.*

### THE INVITATION

*Last September, Anton and partner Emily were anxiously waiting to close on a new house and were down to the final weeks before the birth of their second child. His phone rang. It was Stella proprietor Amanda Danielson — calling to tell Anton he had received an invitation to cook at the James Beard House.*

It was mind blowing. I remember looking out on the lake and telling Emily and freaking out because it was the epitome of my career so far. I never ever thought I would ever do that. We had a month to

figure out when we wanted to do our dinner. Summers are when we get the best local things, but it's also the time when we can't leave for a week. Our philosophy is farm to table, and we were pretty sure that's why they wanted us there, so I didn't want to show up with a bunch of produce from Mexico.

*They decided on May, which would offer up early spring northern Michigan goodies in addition to winter root vegetables and local meat and fish.*

### THE WAIT

That gave us seven months to just sit there and twiddle our thumbs. It kind of went away, and I didn't think about it.

*Then February bit, and another honor came: Anton was named a semi-finalist for the James*

*Beard Foundation Award for Best Chef: Great Lakes. It was possible that he would need to attend the awards dinner just days before his dinner at the Beard House.*

I kind of thought that might happen, but I didn't make the finals. That's okay.

At that point, I still hadn't done a menu. I floundered between doing a 'greatest hits of my travels' menu and a 'greatest hits of Stella' menu. I finally decided to do a 'greatest hits of Stella' and wrote the menu in about a half hour, really quick.

Four days before we left, two things started happening. First off, I couldn't wait any longer. I needed to go. I got really anxious. Secondly, I started really second-guessing the menu and myself. I thought I shouldn't be doing this menu, I should have selected a city in Italy I've visited and done dishes from that region. I really started doubting myself.

### NYC BOUND

We shipped out the food (enough for 80) the day we left. Meat, produce, all things local except milk and cream, because when we got to New York we planned to go to the farmer's market, but we should have sent Shetler's cream. We got farm-fresh cream, but it was different, and my recipe for panna cotta did not turn out, and so we had to redo it the day of the dinner, which kind of scared me a little bit.



Anton in the kitchen during his night at the Beard House.

Photo courtesy of Joan Garvin

### THE BEARD HOUSE

When we walked in there was an old black gentleman sitting at the door. He stuck his hand out and said, 'I'm Mr. Clay, like Cassius. I was James Beard's personal assistant, and I've worked here for 55 years, and I'm 87 years old. Welcome to the Beard House.' Beard died 15 years ago. Mr. Clay still comes every day of the week at 2 in the morning and sits there and drinks coffee and plays chess and wel-

JAMES BEARD HOUSE CONT'D NEXT

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food&drink CONT'D

JAMES BEARD HOUSE. CONT'D FROM PG. 42

comes people – deliveries and all that – until 2 in the afternoon, and that's his shift.



Anton stands with portrait of the late James Beard

THE DINNER

Every course was spot-on. The fish course (local walleye) was the only difficult one to execute, and I knew it would be ... we were searing scallops and fish to order. But once we got past that it was really simple. Several people came up to me after and said, 'Walleye? We never get walleye in New York.' They really appreciated it. Everyone was blown away by our local wine and Short's beer. I was on top of the world. It

was everything I could ever ask for it to be.

I had expressed that I would like to come back and asked if I would need to be invited again or could I ask. They said, 'You do need to be invited, but we'll see what happens' ... and kind of smirked a little.

ANTON MEETS NY ITALIAN

Our last day in New York, Emily and I were walking in Greenwich Village ... looking for a mom and pop spaghetti and meatball joint. We found a place ... and when the 80-something year-old chef, who had also cooked at the Beard House, heard I had just cooked there, he said, 'Oh my, you are my new friend!' After lunch, he gave us tiramisu and said 'it's the best you've ever had.' And it was. He said, 'I need to leave and go do business, but I'm getting old and I'm not going to give anyone in New York City my knowledge. If you come back at six, I'll show you how to make it.'

So, I did, and I got some amazing recipes. He told me about his tomato sauce, which I am running at the restaurant right now.

*He then introduced Anton to a table of women as his new friend from Michigan. They, coincidentally, were also from Michigan (Bay City) and asked where his restaurant was.*

I said Traverse City and this woman said, 'It's Stella. I send people there all the time. I love it.' This all in Greenwich Village in a mom and pop spaghetti joint. BN

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