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Hurry up, slow down

by **Abby Luby**

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The image of a snail with its swirled shell atop the glistening mollusk not only conjures up a deliberate, methodical energy, but a tasty escargot. The snail also is the international logo for Slow Food, the eco-gastronomic movement started 23 years ago in Italy that has since gained global popularity. Twelve years ago, Slow Food USA opened headquarters in New York City and local chapters were established across the country. Today, if you see a decal displaying the Slow Food snail in the window of a local restaurant, it means the restaurant has been awarded the "Snail of Approval Award" by the local Slow Food chapter. The award tells patrons that seasonal food served in the restaurant is grown locally and sustainably.



Last year, Slow Food Westchester combined resources with the Putnam and Fairfield County, Connecticut, chapters to become Slow Food Metro North. "Last year was our first year as Slow Food Metro North to give out the Snail of Approval Award," says Kathryn Dysart, who co-chairs Slow Food Metro North with Mimi Edleman, owner of I & Me Farm in Bedford Hills. Last September, the Westchester Country Club hosted a farmer-to-chef networking event--an event, says Dysart, that earned the club the Snail of Approval.

"That got the list of started," Dysart says. "Right now, there are about 10 or 12 nominees that, hopefully, we will be giving awards to over the course of a year."

Slow Food Metro North accepts nominations from the public via its website. Once a nomination is submitted, the nominee is reviewed by a 14-member board made up of chefs, restaurateurs, local farmers, nutritionists and businesspeople. There is no limit to the number of nominations that may be submitted.

Criteria for the award has to reflect a commitment to the local food movement. "We take a look at how long they've been around and to what extent they are involved. We look for quality, authenticity, sustainability and their participation in supporting local farmers," Dysart says. "We also look at things like take-out packaging and if it's compostable."

Contenders also can be local dairies, meat farms, farms or clubs that have an educational program about sustainability.

"If we think they are a deserving restaurant, then we approach them and plan a special event to give them their award," Dysart explains. One such events was staged at Restaurant North in Armonk, whose owners, Stephen Mancini and Eric Gabrynowicz, decided on a personal celebration with friends and family after winning the Snail of Approval Award. "They closed the restaurant to the public," Dysart recalls. "They drew a huge snail on a big chalk board, served local wines and a wonderful family style dinner."

The list of awardees on the Slow Food Metro North website shows some 24 winners, including the Bedford Sportsman, in Bedford Hills, a sporting goods store specializing in trout fishing that just celebrated its 40th anniversary. "They have wonderful programs that focus on the trout streams in the area," Dysart says. "They take people out and teach them how fishing is local and sustainable." Other recipients of the award include Cabbage Hill Farm in Mt. Kisco, Hemlock Hill Farm in Cortlandt Manor and Peter Pratt's Inn in Yorktown Heights.

The Farmhouse, the restaurant at Richard Gere's Bedford Post Inn, is another Snail of Approval Award recipient. Dysart says the restaurant is known for its connection to regional farmers and for serving locally produced food. The Farmhouse recently started a new program featuring a special tasting, donating part of the proceeds to a non-profit organization of their choice. The first group to receive a donation from The Farmhouse: Slow Food Metro North.

"We were chosen in January 2012," Dysart says. "We intend to use this money as seed money for another program that will provide emergency funds to farmers."

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