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From Court to Kitchen

By Susie Iventosch



Mikaela Cowles Photo Tod Fierner

We are touting one of our very own this week. Mikaela Cowles, a contributing writer to the Lamorinda Weekly sports section, happens to be a very good cook! The former Gaels five-year scholarship basketball player is working toward a Masters of Fine Arts in Fiction Writing at St. Mary's College. She is writing a fiction-style cookbook for her thesis, which she hopes to have published after graduation.

"The book is a collection of fictional stories," Mikaela explained. "I have a food element in every story and include a recipe with each."

Mikaela said the recipes come from a variety of sources, but some are recipes that her mom originally taught her and then she adapted to suit her own style. Others she learned to make on her own by researching the Internet or pouring through cookbooks.

"I wanted to learn how to make risotto, so my boyfriend bought me a risotto cookbook," she said. "I also went online to learn more about the dish. I like to explore online to learn about different food concepts."

Mikaela's favorite risotto is made with sauteed shallots, garlic, artichoke hearts and a tiny amount of Asiago cheese. Apparently she is not alone in her love of this dish, her friend and roommate, Julie McAvoy said this is one of her all-time favorite "Mikaela" dishes, too.

"Mikaela has always been a fabulous cook," Julie pointed out. "She is very inventive with recipes and

invites her friends over to try them out. Her recipes are always delicious, but still, she is constantly coming up with ideas to improve them. I think my very favorite is her artichoke heart risotto." Julie and Mikaela co-authored a book their senior year at St. Mary's to show college students how to eat and drink well - cheaply. The book is aptly named *Work Hard, Party Hard* and though not published, was a lot of fun for the girls to produce.

"We had tons of fun writing our book," Julie said. "It was supposed to show how to cook good food for college students on a budget. We not only talked about recipes, but also included dinner party games, the best way to find good wine sales and the staples to always have on hand."

According to Mikaela, one of their professors, Mike Riley, has authored several cookbooks and after reading the draft, he put Mikaela in touch with different writers and cooking groups to get her more involved in the cooking world.

"He taught me a lot about how to format a cookbook, including recipe layout and introductions," she noted.

Mikaela is in her second year of grad school, and hopes to have her manuscript completed by March. She currently works at "across the way" in Moraga, a novelty home goods store that carries an eclectic collection of outdoor furniture, candles, dish and bath towels, barbecues and table wear, among other interesting household items.

"I'd love to write for a food magazine, but unfortunately, there is not a lot of money in writing, so I'm not sure," she said. "But, writing and communicating are vital for anything I pursue. After working in sales at 'across the way' who knows? I might like to go into high-level sales some day. It's really fun and challenging!"

Born and raised in Seattle, Mikaela plans to return to Washington after she completes her master's degree.

"I'm a Northwest girl!"

ACROSS the way

1480G Moraga Road Moraga

Phone: (925) 376-3600 Fax: (925) 376-5018



Mikaela's Artichoke Risotto

(Serves 6 as a side dish, or 4 as a main dish)

INGREDIENTS

2-3 tablespoons olive oil

2-3 shallots, minced

1-2 cloves garlic, minced

1 can (15-ounce) artichoke hearts, drained and finely chopped

1 cup Arborio rice

¼ cup white wine

1/8-1/4 cup Asiago cheese, grated

3 1/4 cups chicken broth

DIRECTIONS

Heat olive oil in pot over medium-high heat and cook shallots until translucent, but not browned. Add garlic and sauté just until fragrant. Then add risotto and cook for about one minute. Add wine, and continue to cook, stirring all the while, until liquid is evaporated. Reduce heat just a little bit, and add broth, one soup ladle at a time, stirring into rice, but then leaving alone until absorbed. Then add another ladle of broth, continuing the process until all broth is used. At the very end, stir artichoke hearts and cheese into rice mixture. Serve hot as a side dish, which Mikaela does, or as a main dish, as I did!

Photo Susie Iventosch

Reach the reporter at: suziven@gmail.com

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