

Amazing food, atmosphere permeates Village

by MARK PAVILONS

They say it 'takes a village' - a term emphasizing the importance of community involvement in achieving a goal.

The Village at Blue Mountain in Collingwood is a prime example of a cohesive 'community' that never fails to impress.

An all-season resort destination, the Village offers a cornucopia of fantastic food, events, accommodations and activities.

My wife and I were fortunate to get away for a couple of days to celebrate our milestone 30th anniversary, and the Village seemed our best option. We visit almost every year and for many reasons, it keeps calling us back.

It's the epitome of destinations, offering a high level of accommodations, top-notch food choices and treats of all descriptions. It's one of the best options within easy reach of anywhere in the GTA.

The charming cobblestone streets never get old and even though we've been there literally dozens of times, there's always something new, some new aspect we discover and explore.

We needed to just get away, reconnect and enjoy one another's company.

Our one-bedroom suite in The Seasons was very nice and well equipped. A kitchen, fireplace, living room and two balconies were just what the doctor ordered! Spacious, clean and updated.

And top of our list was sampling some of the best dining establishments in the province. There's nothing like sharing a great meal with a loved one.

As Alan D. Wolfelt put it: "Food is symbolic of love when words are inadequate."

One would think that the iconic restaurants that have been cornerstones of the Village for decades may get boring or tired. Not so. If anything, they continue to up the ante, and up their game.

The service industry is about quality, atmosphere and customer service. Our choices were tops in all three categories.

My wife's favourite place of all time (and it retains its crown) is Oliver & Bonacini's Cafe Grill nestled in the Westin hotel.

The outdoor terrace offers one of the best views and that's topped by its menu and attention to every detail. One would think patio dining may lose something, but not here, not at all.

Our anniversary lunch began with house recommendations - artichoke and spinach dip and cauliflower bites. Some may think a simple spinach dip is rather straightforward and plain. Not so. This is beautifully presented with a ring of vegetables, corn chips and flatbread. It's the first time we tried a watermelon radish - beautiful.

Cauliflower bites seem to be growing in popularity and this was our first time trying the dish. It was crazy good, with hot and sour sauce, sesame seeds, green onion and a creamy dill dressing.

This is our new go-to appetizer - thank you O&B.

One of the restaurant's top crowd-pleasers is the beef tenderloin kebab, and for good reason.

They are made to perfection and complemented by outstanding truffle parmesan frites, truffle aioli and charred broccoli. Again, the presentation was meticulous, matched only by its taste.

The management and wait staff were every attentive, exemplifying the restaurant's stellar reputation. The manager also presented us with glasses of Prosecco, Cabert, IT ??onderful bonus.

O&B, you're always in our hearts! A bit shout-out to Margot and her team.

The best way to start any day is with a hearty breakfast.

Sunset Grill is known far and wide and there are outlets in our community, too.

The one at Blue is spacious, with a large outdoor patio. Service is lightning-fast and staff were constantly checking to see if everything was to our liking. The food ? elevated standard breakfast fare ??s always good, fresh and hot.

The place gets really busy, and it's amazing how efficient staff are at serving, cleaning up and preparing for the next table. I've never seen anything like it.

The expanded menu has everything your heart desires, whether it's 8 a.m. or 2 p.m.

Kim and I?also had our first Mimosas ? my wife's new-found favourite. A pleasant surprise that made our morning even brighter. Thanks to staff and co-owner Kim.

Our dining experience was blown away for the third time by the dishes at Rusty's at Blue, run by the Substance Food Group. This is not your typical road house fare, not by a long shot.?While the decor screams rustic and wildly entertaining, the food is definitely fine dining.

It's a great place for a group or family meal. Weekends, the place comes alive with music and dancing, so it's a must-visit locale. It also has the largest outdoor space of any restaurant in the Village.

The restaurant's favourites are slow-cooked to perfection. The kitchen staff are to be congratulated ??very bite exceeded our expectations. Dare we say we enjoyed the best BBQ ever?

Yes. Award-winning Pitmaster Stephen Perrin shows off his championship-level skills in every dish.

My slow roasted prime rib was outstanding. It was a staple of mine, but I?hadn't had it a few years. I?was welcomed back into the fold this time. The portion is generous and cooked just right, together with veggies and melt-in-your-mouth mashed potatoes.

Kim said her pork side ribs were the best she's ever had in her entire life! And when they say fall of the bone, they mean it. You just have to look at them, and they slide off the bone. Heavenly.

Had we had more time, we probably would have ordered the Pitmaster Platter, with prime beef, wings, pulled pork, ribs, mac & cheese, coleslaw and pickled veggies.

This place is a meat-lovers dream and there are tons of amazing items on the menu, including typical children's favourites.

Stop in for a burger or dive into BBQ and get messy.

As I?mentioned, there's nothing plain, simple or average in these establishments. All have raised the bar to keep customers coming

back for more.

?This magical, marvelous food on our plate ... has a story to tell. It has a journey,? according to Joel?Salatin. It's our journey, too.

Alongside the Village's charm and international flavour, staff at its restaurants welcome you like family. And that's the best feeling in the world.

Kim and I sipped wine late into the wee hours of the morning on our balcony, watching the moon make its way through the night sky.

We relished in our togetherness, enjoyed over some fabulous meals.

This was an anniversary to remember.