

[Brandywine Table]

The Fox's Kitchen

**RADNOR HUNT MEMBERS AND FRIENDS
SHARE THEIR FAVORITE RECIPES TO
BENEFIT THE HOUNDS FOUNDATION.**

Laura Muzzi Brennan

“It’s no secret that foxhunters love a good party, a good drink, and especially good food.”

So begins *The Fox's Kitchen*, a cookbook created by Philadelphia's historic Radnor Hunt to benefit The Hounds Foundation, which promotes land conservation and proper hound breeding and care. More than a collection of members' 100+ favorite recipes, the scarlet-covered book gives a fascinating peek into foxhunting tradition and etiquette. It also pays homage to the country way of life, dear to The Hounds Foundation and Radnor Hunt members including cookbook committee chairperson Virginia McNeil.

I talked with McNeil and recipe curator Nicole Riegl in January, three months after *The Fox's Kitchen* release. The cookbook was so well-received—nearly all 2000 copies are gone—that 1500 more were scheduled to roll off the presses in late February. I was curious about the process of turning a raw idea into a fully-baked book, information I hope will help other groups taking on the charity cookbook challenge.

And a challenge it is—right up there with jumping fences and stone walls! *The Fox's Kitchen* was two years in the making and became a full-time job for McNeil, but she's quick to attribute the book's success to fellow Radnor Hunt members and friends who shared recipes along with their time, treasure and talent.

McNeil laughs that, while she doesn't list cooking among her strong suits, she is good at organizing projects and inspiring people, especially matching their talents to the right job.



And that's how Nicole Riegl—a nonprofit operations professional by day and food blogger by night—along with passionate home cook Lisa Davne found themselves testing recipes for carrots au gratin, dark chocolate hazelnut tart and apple cider rumtinis. She also recruited her husband, Collin McNeil, a Master of Foxhounds at Radnor Hunt and a gifted wordsmith, to write much of the text.

Once in place, the committee met monthly to tackle decisions, big and small—from whether to use spiral or hard binding to which photographer, book designer and editor could best bring their vision to the page.

For the record, the 288-page hardbound book features showstopping photos by Lancaster food photographer Brian Donnelly and the editorial expertise of NYC-based Rebecca Ffrench. As for the time-consuming, albeit delicious, work of choosing recipes and getting dishes print- and camera-ready, check out the sidebar.

Devising a detailed business plan and fundraising were also essential to the cookbook's launch, says McNeil. She and her committee aimed to cover the \$100K cost completely, so all proceeds from the sale of *The Fox's Kitchen* could go straight to The Hounds Foundation.

But finding sponsors and planning events like the Paper Chase—a joint venture with Brandywine Red Clay Alliance where 100+ riders on horseback crossed beautifully conserved land—have value beyond raising funds. They're a

great way to generate enthusiasm for projects and to partner with folks who share the same mission.

Creating a cookbook like *The Fox's Kitchen* is a huge undertaking, but when doing good and eating well come together, it's sweet charity indeed.



Whisky Sours in glasses on loan from Radnor Hunt members for the photo shoot



Sweet Potato & Chestnut Soup

The recipe for this cozy soup from The Fox’s Kitchen comes with one of Charlie’s Tips (tidbits of cooking know-how from Charlie the Fox): “To roast fresh chestnuts, preheat the oven to 425°. Using a paring knife, make an X-shaped cut on the round side of each chestnut. Arrange them in a single layer on a rimmed baking sheet and roast for 10 to 20 minutes, until the chestnuts start to open, the skins peel back along the cut side, and the meat is tender when pierced with a knife. While still warm, peel off the outside shell and the papery skin.”



- 2 lbs. sweet potatoes
- 2 Tb. extra virgin olive oil
- 2 small yellow onions, thinly sliced
- 1 C. fresh roasted, canned or jarred peeled chestnuts, chopped
- ½ C. brandy
- 4 C. chicken broth
- 1 dried bay leaf
- 1 tsp. sea salt
- ¼ C. crème fraîche
- Chopped fresh chives, for garnish

Preheat the oven to 425°F. Line a rimmed baking sheet with parchment paper.

Using a fork, prick the sweet potatoes in several places and place them on the prepared baking sheet. Roast until they’re soft and can be pierced easily with a fork, about 1 hour 15 minutes. Remove from the oven. Let them cool completely, then peel and cut them into large chunks. Set aside.

In a large Dutch oven or soup pot, heat the olive oil over medium heat until it shimmers. Add the onions and cook, stirring, for 20 minutes, or until they’re soft and just beginning to caramelize. Add ¼ cup water, if needed, to help cook them down.

Add the sweet potato chunks, chestnuts and brandy and simmer for 2 minutes.

Add the broth, bay leaf and salt. Increase the heat to high and bring the soup to a boil, then reduce the heat to low and simmer for 15 minutes, or until the sweet potatoes start to disintegrate.

Remove the soup from the heat and discard the bay leaf.

Working in batches, carefully transfer the soup to a blender and puree until smooth.

A Look inside The Fox’s Kitchen Process

After Radnor Hunt members and friends including Radnor chef Tyler Turner submitted 200+ favorite recipes, Virginia McNeil, recipe curators Nicole Riegl and Lisa Davne along with their team got to work. Here’s how they turned this culinary treasure trove into a celebration of foxhunting, dining and community.

NARROW the POOL. Riegl and Davne looked for recipes that put interesting twists on familiar dishes. Irish Oatmeal Brûlée? Yes! Sausage Shepherd’s Pie. Yes! Yes! Recipes that made this first cut had to appeal to modern tastes (hold the Jello), be approachable and contain easy-to-find ingredients.

DIVIDE and COOK. Committee members divvied up recipes, made them at home and sent feedback to the curators on taste, ease of directions and presentation.

THROW a PARTY: Radnor Hunt members gathered at each other’s homes to sample dishes, share comments and cast ballots. No surprise that malted milk ball cake, chestnut and sweet potato soup, and Southern tomato pie got out the vote!

ARRANGE into MENUS and EDIT. With the help of professional editor Rebecca Ffrench, recipes were slotted into 15 menus from “Full of the Moon Roundtable” to “Tallyho, Let’s Eat!” Ffrench edited recipes for consistency of “voice” and measurements. With a nod to the beloved fox—always called “Charlie” by fox-hunters—she added Charlie’s Tips, a.k.a. helpful cooking hints.

DO a PHOTO SHOOT or TAKE PICTURES: Radnor Hunt members loaned fox-themed serving pieces to Riegl and Davne who worked as “sous chefs” with food stylist Dan Macey to get dishes ready for their close-ups. Then, photographer Brian Donnelly snapped every sweet and savory detail.

Ladle the soup into individual serving bowls and top with a dollop of crème fraîche. Garnish with chopped chives and serve.

Makes 6 servings.

Dark Chocolate Hazelnut Tart

Recipe courtesy of The Fox’s Kitchen.

For the crust:

- 1 ½ C. gingersnap cookie crumbs
- 6 Tb. (¾ stick) unsalted butter, melted
- ¼ tsp. fine sea salt

For the filling:

- 1 C. hazelnuts, coarsely chopped
- 1 C. heavy cream
- 10 oz. high-quality bittersweet chocolate, finely chopped
- ½ C. chocolate-hazelnut spread, such as Nutella, room temperature
- ½ tsp. coarse sea salt

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Position a rack in the lower third of the oven.

Make the crust: In a medium bowl, stir together the gingersnap crumbs, butter and salt. Press the mixture evenly over the bottom of

a 9-inch springform pan. Bake the crust for 7 minutes, then transfer to a wire rack and let cool completely in the pan.

Make the filling: While the crust bakes, put the hazelnuts in a baking dish and toast in the oven, stirring once, for 3 to 5 minutes, until they just start to turn golden. Transfer the pan to the rack next to the crust and let cool.

In a medium saucepan, bring the cream to a boil over medium-high heat. Remove it from the heat and add the chocolate. Let it sit for 5 minutes. Then whisk until the mixture is completely smooth and combined.

Whisk in the chocolate-hazelnut spread. Stir in the toasted nuts, (setting aside a tablespoon for garnish) and the coarse sea salt.

Pour the filling into the cooled crust and freeze until just set, about 25 minutes (do not let the tart fully freeze). Transfer the tart to the refrigerator until ready to serve.

Bring tart to room temperature, for about 20 minutes before serving. Garnish with reserved chopped hazelnuts. Slice and serve.

Makes one 9” tart.



Irish Soda Bread

Recipes that go into charity cookbooks are usually tried and true, often family recipes. Here’s one from my mother that would make a nice addition to any book. I have memories of flour dusting every surface in our kitchen as she made loaf after loaf of this bread to give as Christmas gifts. Now, I bake a few for our annual St. Paddy’s Day dinner, when we serve it with the cottage pie below.

- 9 C. flour
- 3 Tb. baking powder
- 1 Tb. baking soda
- ¼ tsp. coarse kosher salt or a few pinches regular table salt
- 1–2 Tb. sugar, optional
- 3 large eggs
- 9 Tb. melted butter or vegetable oil
- 1 qt. light or regular buttermilk
- 3–4 C. raisins



Preheat oven to 350°. Grease and flour three loaf pans.

In a large bowl, mix together flour, baking powder, baking soda, salt and sugar if using.

In another bowl, beat eggs and stir in melted butter.

Add wet mix to dry mix and stir in buttermilk. Fold in raisins. (I usually mix the dough with my hands, making sure to mix just until ingredients are combined.)

Divide dough among 3 pans. Drop pans gently on counter to get rid of any air pockets. Using a knife, cut a cross into top the dough.

Bake on the middle rack of oven for 50–60 minutes or until knife comes out mostly clean.

Makes 3 loaves.

Cottage Pie

Inspired by Alton Brown’s shepherd’s pie recipe.

For the mashed potato layer:

- 3 lbs. russet or your favorite mashing potato, peeled and cut into ½” pieces.
- 4 C. whole milk
- Pinch of salt
- 8 oz. sour cream
- 2–3 Tb. snipped fresh chives
- Salt to taste

For the beef layer:

- ¼ C. olive oil
- 1 large onion, chopped (about 2 C.)
- 6 cloves garlic, minced
- 3 lbs. ground beef (80% lean/20% fat)
- 2 tsp. kosher salt, plus more to taste
- A few grinds of pepper
- 4 Tb. flour
- 1 ½ Tb. tomato paste
- 2 C. beef broth
- 2 Tb. Worcestershire sauce, plus more to taste
- 1–1 ½ Tb. chopped fresh rosemary leaves
- 2 tsp. fresh thyme
- 2 lb. frozen vegetable mix (carrots, corn, green beans and peas), thawed and at room temperature
- Sweet paprika



Preheat oven to 400°.

Place potatoes in a large saucepan and pour milk over. Bring to a slow simmer over medium-low heat and cook until just tender, about 20 minutes.

Remove potatoes with a slotted spoon and place in a large bowl. Mash and add cooking milk back in, one ladleful at a time until you reach desired consistency. (You will probably have 1 C. milk left over.) Mix in sour cream, salt and chives. Set aside.

While potatoes cook, heat olive oil in a large skillet or Dutch oven over medium

high heat and add onion. Stirring frequently, cook for 3–5 minutes until onions start to soften. Add garlic and cook for one more minute. Add beef and salt and cook until beef browns. Sprinkle flour over meat and toss to coat. Cook for another minute. Add tomato paste, beef broth and 2 Tb. Worcestershire sauce, rosemary and thyme. Bring

to a boil. Cover and reduce heat to low. Cook for approximately 15 minutes until sauce thickens.

Taste and add more salt, pepper and Worcestershire sauce to taste.

Stir in vegetables.

Divide beef mixture between two large casserole dishes and spread evenly. Divide potatoes and top beef, using a spatula to smooth the potatoes into an even layer. Drag a fork gently through the potatoes to create a crisscross design. Dust with sweet paprika.

Bake for 20–25 minutes until beef mixture bubbles a little around the edges of mashed potatoes. If potatoes do not brown, place under broiler for 1–2 minutes.

Makes 2 large casseroles, 12–14 servings. ♦

Laura traces her love of all things culinary to the first time she leafed through her mother's Betty Crocker's Cooky Book—which still occupies a place of honor among her 700+ cookbooks. A passionate supporter of local food, she co-founded a farmers market, judges area food contests, and anticipates restaurant openings with the excitement most people reserve for winning a Mega Millions jackpot.



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