

# Innkeepers are like professional Thanksgiving hosts

**Kristine M. Kierzek**, Special to the Journal Sentinel 6:04 a.m. CST November 20, 2016



(Photo: Mark Phillips)

When it comes to Thanksgiving, everyone expects a big meal. It's a time of togetherness and turkey with guests at the table.

It's also the perfect time to sit down with some experienced innkeepers, bed and breakfast owners and chefs, people who open their tables and make their living hosting meals day in and day out. They've mastered the art of hosting, planning a perfect menu, and making memories.

For 35 years, every Thanksgiving at Bayfield's family-run Old Rittenhouse has meant feeding guests. It's a tradition started by the parents of innkeeper Mark Phillips, one that he happily continues.

For the guests, no shopping, prep, cooking or clean up means less stress, and that allows for focusing on family and friends.

A holiday away from home means comfort and cravings all get their due, and at bed and breakfasts around the state you'll find a lot of thought goes into meals, even breakfast, especially with a food-centered holiday like Thanksgiving. Whether you're traveling and trying a meal in a different place, or adding a new dish to your menu, the holiday table can mean new adventures and new traditions.

At Old Rittenhouse Inn, that means on Thanksgiving they serve a traditional roast turkey dinner plus three additional entrée options.

"My parents really started everything of course, back in the 70s," said Phillips. "They started serving a holiday meal pretty much right away, although I do remember going to my grandma's for some early Thanksgivings. It is really neat to have people come for those special occasions and holiday moments. We do all the clean up, and for some people that's the best part."

"I always enjoy those magical moments when the great food just appears and you don't have to do anything," he said.



**Doug Witcher** (Photo: Doug Witcher)

This Thanksgiving, Doug Witcher will be cooking his first holiday dinner at the 120-year-old [Audubon Inn](http://www.auduboninn.com) (<http://www.auduboninn.com>) in Mayville. An Alabama native, he moved to Wisconsin to be near his wife's family in Beaver Dam. Earlier this year he became the brew chef at the inn, where he's helping to establish a microbrewery with the first batch expected to be ready in January.

As he's done many times in more than three decades of working in restaurants, he will be making and serving his family's dinner the Wednesday evening before Thanksgiving.

"What we're doing is a very traditional Thanksgiving dinner, mixing some Midwestern tradition as well as some southern because our restaurant has a southern theme," he said.

The biggest lesson he's learned serving Thanksgiving dinners over the years? Make plenty of food.

"Honestly, during the holidays people tend to eat more, so just put a lot of food out and have a great selection so they can eat as much as they like," he said.

While turkey is the traditional center of the Thanksgiving meal, once you have the basics covered consider introducing one or more new options to the table

"We've always had the roast turkey and the traditional stuffing, cranberries and all the wonderful things that go with that, but we always offer two to three other options," said Phillips. "The vast majority still order turkey, but having those other options is definitely nice."

He continued, "We'll do a fish—last year it was salmon—and roast pork loin or some slow roasted meat that is browned off and braised real tender, and typically something vegetarian. Last year we had a really neat quiche with a gluten-free crust."

When it comes to making a memorable meal, setting the scene can help. At Pedal's Inn in Wales, owner and innkeeper Dee Nierzwicki adds little touches like flowers, trinkets and sweet treats to make her guests feel special.

Phillips reminds us not to forget the beverage component. For staff at [Old Rittenhouse Inn](http://rittenhouseinn.com) (<http://rittenhouseinn.com>), that begins with thinking about which wines work with traditional holiday food and what guests might enjoy.

"We start by going with Pinot Noirs, which are so nice because they're soft and food-friendly, versatile wines. A lot of people also love sparkling wines for the holiday time," he said. "A sparkling rosé is really fun before the meal because that wonderful blush color and effervescence sets a good mood for holiday times. After dinner is all about warm drinks, maybe spiced cider, warm and soothing to your tummy at the end of the meal."

People definitely will be seeking out traditional favorites on their plates, but cooking for a crowd also provides opportunities to add to the table. Switching up the sides or spices can add variety while still covering all the comfort food bases.

That's what you'll see at the [Audubon Inn \(http://www.auduboninn.com\)](http://www.auduboninn.com), where Witcher's southern roots influence his approach to sweet potatoes and dressing.

"On the Thanksgiving table in the South you always do cornbread dressing, and from what I understand in the Midwest it is more of a white bread dressing instead," Witcher added. "I've also found in the Midwest you've always got to have mashed potatoes, so we'll do buttermilk mashed potatoes and also a southern treat of candied sweet potatoes made with brown sugar, orange, some orange zest and pecans."

Noting state laws that prohibit many [bed and breakfast operators \(http://www.wbba.org\)](http://www.wbba.org) from providing dinners to guests (unless they operate a restaurant or commercial kitchen), Nierzwicki doesn't give up the idea of cooking for Thanksgiving. Instead, the owner/operator of [Pedal's Inn \(http://www.pedalsinn.com\)](http://www.pedalsinn.com) in Wales makes an all-out effort to incorporate traditional holiday flavors into special breakfasts. That's also something you can do at home, offering an opportunity to stretch out the celebrations or relax the morning after.

"I love to incorporate Thanksgiving into breakfast," she said. "I don't mean leftovers, but I plan out special meals using local and seasonal ingredients, like w rice sausage patties and a cranberry compote, or pumpkin crepes. I like to do things you won't find almost anywhere else, and make it a memorable meal. It's a good way to start the day or wind down a holiday."

## Recipes

[Rittenhouse Quiche with Red Pepper Rouille \(/story/life/food/recipes/2016/11/11/rittenhouse-quiche-red-pepper-rouille/93479074/\)](/story/life/food/recipes/2016/11/11/rittenhouse-quiche-red-pepper-rouille/93479074/)



Old Rittenhouse Inn in Bayfield serves this vegetarian quiche. (Photo: Old Rittenhouse Inn)

[Fire-roasted Red Pepper and Crab Bisque \(/story/life/food/recipes/2016/11/11/fire-roasted-red-pepper-and-crab-bisque/93493424/\)](/story/life/food/recipes/2016/11/11/fire-roasted-red-pepper-and-crab-bisque/93493424/)



Old Rittenhouse Inn's Fire-roasted Red Pepper and Crab Bisque would make a bright addition to your Thanksgiving table. (Photo: Christian Giannelli)

[Poached Pear Crème Brûlée \(/story/life/food/recipes/2016/11/11/poached-pear-crme-brle/93489502/\)](https://www.fox43.com/story/life/food/recipes/2016/11/11/poached-pear-crme-brle/93489502/)



Old Rittenhouse Inn's Poached Pear Crème Brûlée is a holiday-worthy dessert. (Photo: Christian Giannelli)

[Pumpkin Crêpes with Orange Crème Filling and Orange Pecan Vodka Syrup \(/story/life/food/recipes/2016/11/11/pumpkin-crepes-orange-creme-filling-and-orange-pecan-vodka-syrup/93452176/\)](https://www.fox43.com/story/life/food/recipes/2016/11/11/pumpkin-crepes-orange-creme-filling-and-orange-pecan-vodka-syrup/93452176/)



Pumpkin Crepes with Orange Creme Filling and Orange Pecan Vodka Syrup are perfect for Thanksgiving morning breakfast. (Photo: Pedal's Inn)

[Candied Sweet Potatoes with Grand Marnier \(/story/life/food/recipes/2016/11/11/candied-sweet-potatoes-grand-marnier/93481314/\)](http://on.jsonl.in/2fHBLGk)

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