

A Bird in the Hand...

Is worth plenty on the dinner table, especially when it's from L&L Pheasantry. **BY BARBARA ANN ROSENBERG**

"JEEVES," SAID THE LADY OF the house, addressing her butler before the guests arrived for her annual hunt breakfast, "please make sure there's plenty of pheasant on the sideboard. Everybody loves it!"

Well, way back when anybody even had a butler (named Jeeves or otherwise), let alone a hunt breakfast or a sideboard, practically the only people who ever had the pleasure of tasting pheasant were the families and friends of gentlemen who hunted for the sport of it...or, before them, families of hunters who shot the birds for sustenance.

But all that has changed thanks to Lee and Linda Kiefer, who raise more than a half-million pheasants a year — along with partridges, French hens called *poussin*, and wild turkey — at L&L (for Lee and Linda) Pheasantry Inc. in the hills of Hegins, Pa. (near Pottsville). There are more than 400 licensed game farms just in Pennsylvania, and L&L is one of the largest in the world. "Many of those in Pennsylvania are hobbyists," Kiefer says. "Perhaps only 20 to 25 are actual producers."

At L&L, it's possible to buy pheasants cleaned, dressed and either fresh or frozen. Made into sausages, too. Kiefer says those sausages are made entirely without fat. "And pheasant is a lean bird to begin with," he notes. So what keeps the sausages moist? "I won't tell

you that," he says, smiling. "It's my secret."

Pheasant is succulent, moist and delicate. And while it's flavorful, it's not gamey, as wild birds often are. The sausage made by L&L is herbladen and flavorful, too, and is a wonderful complement to the birds.

Lee Kiefer first became acquainted with pheasant in 1947 when he was just 6 years old. His father owned a feed store and was a partner in a farm as well. To repay a debt, a business associate gave him

a pair of pheasants. "My father gave them to me," says Kiefer, who, in spite of his tender years, went on to raise them for fun and profit.

Kiefer was always an enterprising young man. When he was 8, he began to deliver papers — on two routes. And with the money he earned, he bought, of all things, life insurance. At age 8! "As a form of savings," he recalls. All the while, though, he was buying more pheasants. And hatching the eggs. "Until, at one time, I had 30 different species." And he kept buying more life insurance, too.

Then, in 1959, when Kiefer had finished Ford business school in Pottsville, he was ready to make his move — to a farm of his own. "That's where all the life insurance I'd bought came in handy," Kiefer says. "I used it as collateral to buy my 40 acres and begin raising pheasants in earnest." So

much in earnest that he now has a dozen contract farms in Lancaster County that are raising birds to his strict specifications — no vaccination against diseases, and their water must be unchlorinated and treated with ultraviolet light to kill bacteria. "All natural," says Kiefer. Then all those birds are sent to the nearby L&L plant for processing. "We have the only USDA-inspected pheasant-processing plant in the country — even though there's no government requirement for it,"



Linda and Lee Kiefer with one of their feathered friends.

DONNA CHARELLI

says Kiefer. "And since our production is not seasonal, we keep it busy year-round."

Raising pheasants has its hazards, though, according to Kiefer. "They're basically wild birds and, if they get frightened, they'll all pile up in a corner of the pen and smother." Kiefer notes, however, that they are "relatively disease-free birds, unlike chickens."

Lee Kiefer's wife, Linda, plays an active role in the business, although not in raising the birds. "She handles the books and paperwork," he says proudly.

Both Kiefer offspring are involved in pheasantry, too. Aron, a Penn State graduate in computer science, is secretary/treasurer and Kathy is corporate vice president. She has responsibility for coordinating production with sales. "When an airline wants 4½-ounce pheasant

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breasts, for example, Kathy is the one who sees to it that they're ready and shipped."

And marrying into the Kiefer family has earned both son-in-law Troy and daughter-in-law Veronica a place in the business, as well. "Veronica is the credit manager and Troy is in charge of transportation," Kiefer explains. While the Kiefer kids no longer live in the big homestead, they're not far away. "They bought a double house just a mile-and-a-half away."

L&L doesn't only sell its products to airlines. "We have a Philadelphia food broker and a distributor," says Kiefer, explaining that they, in turn, sell to a number of area restaurants, such as The Sign of the Sorrel Horse, a former stagecoach stop located nine miles north of Doylestown on Old Bethlehem Road. The restaurant/inn is run by Jon Atkin, an ex-Brit who learned to cook game in Scotland, Austria and Bavaria. Co-owner Monique Gaumont-Lanvin, as her

name implies, is as French as French can be — and a Paris Cordon Bleu graduate to boot. Pheasant is a staple on the menu at the Sorrel Horse several months a year. Chef Atkin prepares the fowl in a number of different ways, including a casserole in which it's paired with venison, and one special dish called pheasant Miller — named for an artist friend and good customer — that is made of pheasant breast stuffed with chestnut puree and served with a black raspberry-and-truffle sauce.

Every weekend, the restaurant has a special five-course, \$31 menu designed around pheasant or quail — with a twist. Patrons may, if they wish, bring one or more pheasants that they have shot at the Tohickon Hunting Preserve on Route 611 in Pipersville, about 10 minutes from the restaurant, and Atkin will cook

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them to order. (Tohickon charges \$80 per person to shoot just four birds released for each hunter.) Or Atkin will furnish the birds for \$15 apiece, bringing the cost of the complete dinner to \$46.

Another restaurant that serves L&L pheasant is The Pepper Mill Cafe in Ardmore. And the birds are available to at-home cooks directly from L&L Pheasantry Inc., East MT Road, P.O. Box 298, RD 1, Hegins, Pa. 17938-9412, (717) 682-9074. They cost approximately \$5 a pound for whole birds, which weigh one to three pounds, depending on their age, and \$16 a pound for boneless breast — plus delivery by UPS.

But whether it's bought from a poulterer or shot by a hunter, pheasant is a healthful delicacy (particularly as raised at L&L). And easy enough to prepare at home, with or without Jeeves to put it on the sideboard. ■

Local writer Barbara Ann Rosenberg last dished about buffalo burgers.

CHRISTMAS PHEASANTRY

TIRE D OF THE SAME OLD BIRD? FOR A CHANGE OF PACE THIS HOLIDAY SEASON, you might want to consider breaking with the tradition of turkey or goose as the centerpiece of the meal: Try pheasant — either the breasts prepared in any number of ways, or the whole bird, stuffed and roasted.

Here are a few ways to make your holiday dinner even more festive than usual.

Lee Kiefer recommends a fine Burgundy to accompany the birds. You might also want to add young spinach or carrots for a wonderfully tasteful garnish.

Sausage-Stuffed Pheasant Breasts

2 10- or 11-ounce boneless pheasant breasts, halved

1 pound pheasant-parsley sausage (L&L makes this, too)

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup breadcrumbs

2 tablespoons green onions, chopped (white only)

2 tablespoons capers, drained

1 teaspoon dried thyme (or less, depending on taste)

3 tablespoons brandy, sherry, Madeira or port (use your favorite)

2 tablespoons butter

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon pepper (white preferred, but black will do)

1 cup canned chicken stock

Place pheasant breast halves between two pieces of plastic wrap and pound to $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch thickness. Mix sausage, breadcrumbs, green onions, capers, thyme and wine or brandy. Spread on pounded breasts and roll into thick sausage shape. Tie with string.

Brown on all sides in one tablespoon butter in a flameproof casserole on top of the stove. Preheat oven to 350°. Season rolled breasts with salt and pepper and dot with additional tablespoon butter, cut in small pieces. Roast at 350° for 45 minutes, turning and basting every 15 minutes with approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ cup chicken stock each time.

To serve, cut tying string and serve one roll per person.

Serves four.

Roast Pheasant With Wild Rice Stuffing

2 whole pheasants

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt (optional)

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon freshly ground pepper (optional)

2 tablespoons butter

1 package Uncle Ben's wild rice mixture (follow stuffing recipe on package)

Preheat oven to 325°. Stuff and tie each bird. Salt, pepper, and wrap separately in aluminum foil. Roast two hours and unwrap. Turn up oven heat to 450°, brush birds with two tablespoons melted butter and roast 15 minutes more to brown.

Skim fat (if any) from pan drippings and reduce by half to serve with pheasant and stuffing.

Serves four or more.

Lime-Honey Broiled Pheasant Breasts

2 12- or 13-ounce boneless pheasant breasts

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup fresh lime juice

1 tablespoon butter

1 teaspoon honey

1 clove garlic, finely chopped

2 tablespoons white wine

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt

$\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon coarsely ground pepper

Cut pheasant breasts in half. Place lime juice, butter, honey and garlic in small saucepan and cook until butter melts. Add white wine and stir. Cool and pour over pheasant breasts. Marinate one hour or more.

Place pheasant breasts in flameproof pan, skin side up. Add salt and pepper. Set broiler to 400° and broil about five inches from heat for about 10 to 12 minutes until brown but not dry. Pour marinade over breasts and serve with rice.

Serves four.

— B.A.R.