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Mark Hallett: Goody's Lobster Shack

Questions & Answers with community faces

Mark Hallett (54) grew up in Riverhead, New York, on eastern Long Island. Growing up on the Eastern Seaboard, he knows good seafood. But that is getting ahead of ourselves.

Hallett attended Suffolk Community College and graduated in 1990 with an Associate's degree in liberal arts. He then attended The State University of New York (SUNY), where he was pursuing a Bachelor's degree in geology; however, he realized pretty early on that he was a better cook than he ever could have been a geologist, so he switched gears completely. Hallett attended the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, New York, arguably the country's premiere culinary school, graduating in 1993 with honors for his second Associate's degree, this time in culinary arts.

After his second college graduation, Hallett went back to Long Island for a year and worked at the North Fork Country Club; then he moved to Connecticut, where he worked for two years in Old Greenwich at the Boxing Cat Grill, which is owned by Michigan comedian Tim Allen. Hopping around as young chefs do, he worked for two years as a sous chef at Darien Country Club before moving to Massachusetts for the next two decades: he was the executive chef at the Franklin Country Club for six years; he then worked for 13 years at Not Your Average Joe, a privately owned chain with 18 units in New England and nine in the mid-Atlantic region that collectively do about \$90 million in sales annually. During his time there, Hallett eventually became their training chef, meaning that he taught all of their chefs for all 27 units; also for Not Your Average Joe, Hallett became the corporate executive chef of the New England region, so he was managing all 18 units in New England at one point.

Having been with Not Your Average Joe for more than a decade, Hallett was ready for a change. His next step was with Fiorella's, Italian-inspired cuisine of six units within 10 miles of each other in Massachusetts. The plan was for Hallett to help with expansion into even more spaces—but then the COVID-19 pandemic hit, and since the expansions were put indefinitely on hold, it meant that he was the first one cut from Fiorella's in March 2020.

So, Hallett and his wife, Kate [Koengeter] (52), spent a year figuring out what to do next.

The couple had met in 2008 in Boston and were married nine months later; Hallett has two children from his first marriage: Caroline (19) and Matthew (21). Kate grew up in Dexter, Michigan, near Ann Arbor, and she used to vacation in Frankfort with family and friends. She loved it here, and as the kids were growing up, Kate brought her husband and the Hallett children to vacation in Northern Michigan, which they also fell in love with; the family came every summer after for a week or so each year.

But when the Halletts became “empty nesters” around the same time as the pandemic layoff—daughter Caroline left to attend Colorado University in Boulder, and son Matthew was already attending Roger Williams University in Rhode Island—the plan was to move to Michigan permanently.

Hallett says that they sold their home in Grafton, Massachusetts, in June 2021, traveled a bit, then moved to Frankfort in August 2021. However, they had already purchased a commercial building in Frankfort in April 2021—before they purchased their home—and the building came with renters already: Bayside Printing, Inc. and the Frankfort-Elberta Area Chamber of Commerce.

The plan is to continue with these two renters in the front of the building, but the Halletts have big plans for the back—and the parking lot. The building was an IGA supermarket years ago, so it has a big warehouse in the back where the Halletts plan to build a butcher shop and a gourmet market.

In the meantime, while the Halletts wait on permits and construction, they are cutting through some of the red tape and getting their names out in the community by opening up a to-go food kiosk in the parking lot next door—Goody's Lobster Shack opened on July 4th in downtown Frankfort. Food is served out of a custom built “tiny house/kitchen.”

Continuing with our interview series on impactful Benzie County characters, *The Betsie Current* caught up with Hallett as he was closing up the Shack for the day.

The Betsie Current: What made you want to open a lobster shack? What do you enjoy about this line of work? What do you think is different about the food you are serving up from what those in our area are already producing?

Mark Hallett: Well, I always wanted to open my own place, but with the pandemic and how restaurants were in trouble during that time, we wanted to go a different route. My wife, Kate, and I wanted to open a business with low overhead and a small staff that we could easily manage, allowing me to focus on creating quality food that makes people happy. Growing up on Long Island, I was surrounded by water, and I've always enjoyed cooking seafood—it's a big part of who I am. I'm trying to give people a gourmet option without all the bells and whistles. Great food speaks for itself, and that is what I'm trying to give to the town; all New England fare, with some of my own twists. I love seafood cookery, and eating it is even better. It's not a job for me; it's fun and yummy.

Current: How did you get started, and what is next?

Hallett: We bought the building in April 2021, and our overall plans are to eventually open a butcher shop and a gourmet market/deli out of the back of the building—while still keeping the two renters in the front—but that is going to take some extensive renovations. With supply chain issues lately and other stuff to get done, I was thinking last fall, “What am I going to do this winter?” So, we bought a “tiny house” trailer from Iron Eagle Trailers in Portland, Oregon, and they delivered it over the winter. I built it with Steve Bradley, a friend and builder from Frankfort; we built it from the bottom up, so that we could open this summer with Goody's Lobster Shack. For the butcher shop and the market, we're hoping to get it open for next season; the engineering plans are finished but need to be submitted to the City of Frankfort for approval. Phase III of our overall business plan will be to make that space into a commercial kitchen, so that we can do catering out of it, too.

Current: What does a typical day of work look like for you? Does it get hot in the Shack?

Hallett: I open up the kitchen at 9 a.m. and begin prepping fresh food for the day. I take inventory and place orders with our suppliers. Finally, I help set the stage for the customers to arrive and open the window right around noon. After lunch service, we take a break from 3 to 4 p.m. to recharge, prep, and get ready for dinner service, and then we close around 7:30 p.m. Currently, my wife and I have one employee beyond ourselves. We are doing about 60 to 75 checks a day; a little busier on Friday and Saturday. I'm the only one cooking in the kitchen trailer—90 percent of what we serve is cooked to order, so it can get busy at points. But I've always said that people will wait for great food. No air conditioning in the Shack; just a nice Lake Michigan breeze.

Current: Where does the name "Goody" come from?

Hallett: You'll have to figure that one out. It started way back in 1710 on Cape Cod's Wellfleet, Massachusetts. [As a clue? Mariah “Goody” Hallett.](#)

Current: What are your top three sellers right now? What are your personal three favorite items that you sell?

Hallett: In order, our top three sellers are lobster rolls, crab cakes, and our shrimp po' boy. After lobster rolls, my favorite three items are crab cakes, English fish 'n' chips, and the shrimp po' boy.

Current: What kinds of things do you do for fun, when you are not working?

Hallett: Golfing, fishing, and exploring new restaurants.

Current: What other things are you involved with? How did you get involved with them, and why are you passionate about these causes?

Hallett: With more than 250 chapters across the United States and the globe, For the Children is an organization with the mission to create life-changing moments for children in the foster care system who have experienced relational trauma and abuse. For the Children hosts a “Royal Family Kids Camp” for children ages 7-12 to enjoy a

week of summer camp. During the COVID-19 pandemic, however, the RFK Camp was shut down, so Kate and I hosted a two-day camp at our home in Grafton, [Massachusetts,] where I cooked for about 100 children and volunteers in 2020. We got involved with For the Children through our church back in Massachusetts. It's very fulfilling to spend time focusing on the needs of others and giving back to children in our community.

Current: How have you seen Benzie County/Northern Michigan change since you first started coming up here? What are your hopes for the area in the future?

Hallett: My hope is that the area doesn't get over-commercialized and that Frankfort keeps its local charm.

Current: What are the biggest challenges and rewards of living/working in Benzie County and in Northern Michigan, in general? What is the best or most rewarding part of your job?

Hallett: The biggest challenge would be staffing and getting quality products into the area. The rewards are the natural beauty and outdoor activities, as well as the warm and welcoming community. The most rewarding part of my job is seeing my customers with smiling, happy faces and full bellies!

Current: What are your favorite local events and activities? Any favorite dining, recreation, hiking spots?

Hallett: Watching the sunsets over Lake Michigan. I enjoy visiting the wineries/breweries, the Frankfort Arts & Crafts Fair, and the pumpkin drop at the Frankfort Fall Festival. We enjoy eating at Vita Bella Italian Kitchen, boating on Crystal Lake, and hiking at Green Point Dunes Trail.

Current: What does your perfect summer day look like in Benzie County? How would you spend it?

Hallett: Floating on Crystal Lake with friends and family.

Goody's Lobster Shack is located at 515 (B) Main Street, in the parking lot between Bayside Printing, Inc. and the West Shore Bank in downtown Frankfort. The Shack is serving lunch seven days a week and dinner five nights a week; open Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays from 12-7:30 p.m. and 12-4 p.m. on Thursdays and Sundays. The Shack is not currently taking to-go orders via phone. Website and Facebook pages are coming soon, and menus will be available online at that point.