



Newton couple cooks at New England Soup Factory

By **Bob Tremblay/Daily News staff**

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NEWTON — On a cold, winter's day, nothing warms the heart, soothes the soul and pleases the taste buds like soup.

Especially soup made from scratch. Especially soup steeped in tradition yet filled with invention.

Like the soup served at the New England Soup Factory where variety is the spice of life and spice the life of variety.

The husband-and-wife team of Marjorie Druker and Paul Brophy have been ladling out these soups at their Newton establishment since 1997 following the success of the first soup factory in Brookline, which opened two years earlier.

The Newton couple - both Johnson & Wales graduates - match their soups to fit the New England seasons - spring brings zucchini, asparagus and spinach into the kitchen. Summer is the time to show off New England soups and chowders and wow customers with cold and cool concoctions. In the fall they cook with lots of mushrooms, squashes and apples. And in the winter they cook with root vegetables, meats and legumes.

Favorite winter soups include spicy chick pea and butternut squash soup, farmers' root vegetable soup, split pea with spinach, crab bisque, sweet potato chicken barley, tomato habanero and cheddar jack cheese, clam and saffron paella, eggplant parmesan soup, tomato, butternut squash and herb soup and chipotle white bean and hominy chili.

Ethnic soups include Syrian chick pea soup with lemon and tahini, Indonesian carrot soup, Mediterranean chick pea, lentil and rice soup with basil and African chicken and peanut.

Check the factory's Web site or "soupline" to see what soups are available on its menu. The six house soups are chicken vegetable, New England clam and corn chowder, chili con carne, lobster newburg, Italian beef stew and chicken pot pie. Four change daily.

At the Newton location, soups recently included spinach feta and toasted pine nuts, Nantucket Bay scallop chowder with bacon and chives, potato chestnut with caramelized onions and farmers' root vegetable.

The factory also sells fresh and packaged prepared foods from fresh pasta sauces and macaroni and cheese to such salads as its signature goat cheese salad paired with beets roasted walnuts with pomegranate honey vinaigrette, habanero chicken salad, fluffy dill egg salad, Italian cucumber salad, artichoke and sun-dried tomato salad, Israeli chopped salad, green olive and walnut salad and roasted sweet potato salad.

Then there are the desserts such as four chocolate brownies, butterscotch blondies, chocolate oatmeal revel bars, brown sugar chocolate chip cookies, oatmeal and yellow raisin, chunky chocolate chip, lime and orange coolers, molasses chews, peanut butter and jelly cookies, chocolate candy cane cookies and peppermint chocolate chip meringues. Again, check the Web site to see what's being offered.

In 2007, Druker co-authored her first cookbook, "New England Soup Factory Cookbook" with Clara Silverstein, a Boston-area food writer. With more than 100 soups and more than 50 color photographs, the book features stories about each soup and lists a soup for every occasion. A best seller on Amazon, the book is in its fourth printing.

The eatery has won numerous awards over the years, including four Best of Boston awards.

Each location has about 2,200 square feet of space and seats about 20. Catering is available.

Druker recently discussed the New England Soup Factory with Daily News staff writer Bob Tremblay.

QUESTION: How did you come up with the name?

ANSWER: I wanted a name that made us sound serious about our soup making. I didn't want to attract just women or just men and I felt the name could attract both. Living and growing up in New England felt like the perfect fit for my name and concept.

QUESTION: Why was this business started?

ANSWER: I always loved making soup and cooking in general. People kept calling me and asking me to make soup for them because they had a friend who needed some. I thought to myself that I could make a living making and selling soup.

QUESTION: What did you and your husband do before opening the New England Soup Factory?

ANSWER: We both worked in the restaurant industry. We met in culinary school. Right before we opened, Paul was managing the Black Goose Restaurant on Beacon Hill and I had my own private cooking and catering business.

QUESTION: Describe your cuisine.

ANSWER: Our cuisine is all about fresh and innovative full-flavored food. Flavor and spice have been the key to our success. We use the most interesting and unique ingredients and cook seasonally so that our customers can taste the wonderful sensation that each season brings.

QUESTION: What distinguishes you from other restaurants?

ANSWER: We offer upscale gourmet food in a quick service setting. When most people are busy and on the run, they tend to eat fast food which may not feed them a nutritionally balanced meal. You can come to New England Soup Factory and eat sweet potatoes, lentils, barley, nuts, loads of vegetables and good proteins.

What also makes us different is that I am personally still in my kitchen every day producing the food that our customers eat. I am very hands-on and I influence everything that we prepare.

QUESTION: And your prices?

ANSWER: A 12-ounce bowl of soup, chili or chowder costs \$4.75; stew and lobster newburg costs \$5.50. Each dish is served with a roll.

It's important for us to be affordable yet not compromise the integrity of our food.

QUESTION: Any future plans?

ANSWER: We would love to brand New England Soup Factory and be in grocery stores one day.

QUESTION: And your staff?

ANSWER: We have 40 employees, many of them long-standing. Our 17-year-old daughter Emily works in our Newton store and grew up watching our business. We love to have her with us when we work. It's funny for her to see the lines of people waiting to eat our food when she just sits down at the dinner table every night and does not wait in line to be fed. She likes me to bring her home soup on the days she's not working.

QUESTION: Who does what in this husband-and-wife working relationship?

ANSWER: I am the chef and Paul runs our two shops and manages daily operations and finances. I have always been the chef. I was trained classically at Johnson & Wales in Providence. I have cooked professionally since I was 17.

I opened the first Boston Chicken when I was 21 and created the menu and recipes for them. I cook at home every night and we always have something really good. I am always trying and testing ideas so that each day I have fresh inspiration.

Being a chef is very important to me and I am proud of the fact that I am still creating the food that our customers eat on a daily basis.

QUESTION: Any news to report?

ANSWER: Our line of prepared foods is becoming very popular with our customers. It completes a meal at dinnertime.

I make what I would make and serve my family. My family eats very well and I want our customers to have the same experience.

QUESTION: Any MetroWest connections?

ANSWER: I grew up in Newton Centre and now live in Newtonville. Our daughter will graduate from Newton North High School this spring just as I did.

I adore my community and feel very at home here. When I work in our Newton location everyday it feels like a reunion. I see friends from school, summer camp and temple. I feel very blessed to live in such a warm and loving community where the ideology represents the way that we feel.

QUESTION: What is your signature dish?

ANSWER: Our chicken vegetable. I tell people that it's like going to the North End for pizza or pasta. Jewish chicken soup from Brookline and Newton does not get anymore Jewish and authentic than that! Keeping my Jewish traditions alive for me, my family and our customers is a rich and rewarding feeling.

NEW ENGLAND SOUP FACTORY

Addresses: 244 Needham St., Newton, and 2-4 Brookline Place, Brookline

Owners: Marjorie Druker and Paul Brophy

Hours: 10:30 a.m. to 8 p.m. weekdays, 10:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekends

Web site: www.newenglandsoupfactory.com

Phone numbers: 617-558-9966 in Newton, 617-739-1695 in Brookline; the "soupline" number is 617-739-1899.

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