





Frozen Skiers, Fresh Food

Meet Laurie Little, the backcountry cook behind the cozy White Grass Cafe.

interviewed by ZACK HAROLD

WHEN WHITE GRASS SKI TOURING CENTER opened in 1981, it was all about the powder. But it wasn't long before the White Grass Cafe started attracting just as much attention as the action on the trails. You won't find lukewarm chicken fingers or crayon-colored nacho cheese here. The staff makes almost everything in-house, with a menu of fresh fare for vegetarians and meat eaters alike.

Behind it all is Laurie Little, wife of White Grass co-founder Chip Chase. She's the one who keeps the kitchen running smoothly and hungry diners satisfied. The cafe is now so renowned that the line for dinner sometimes stretches out the door—but patrons are more than willing to wait in the cold for a seat at Little's table.

WV Living caught up with Little before White Grass opened for the season to learn more about the cafe and its cuisine. 643 Weiss Knob Ski Road, Davis, 304.866.4114, whitegrass.com "White Grass XC Ski Area" on Facebook

“ I started cooking when I was about 14 but I never had any formal training. Then I got interested in the vegetarian thing and learned from my friend Mary Beth Gwyer. It was her idea to have lunches and things.

That was in the early '80s. And, with cross-country skiing, people weren't used to having a restaurant where they skied. They would walk in with their bagged lunch. Back then everybody was self-sufficient. Then it kind of blossomed.

We'll do a couple hundred lunches in a day. We grill panini sandwiches. Sometimes we have five or six different soups on the chalkboard. That's really popular. We always make chili—that's our signature dish, vegetarian chili. It has bulgur wheat in it, that's the beef substitute. A lot of people don't notice. On a busy weekend, we'll serve 30 gallons.

We make chocolate chip cookies and oatmeal raisin. That's one of the things

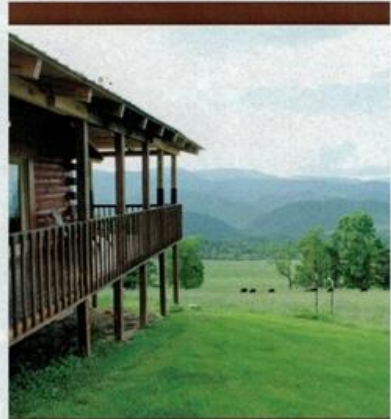
people like—walking through the door and smelling the cookies in the ovens. One of our new cookies is a chai sugar cookie. Everybody just loves it.

We do dinners on the weekends. For dinners, we like to do a really eclectic menu. We do an Asian duck that's really good. We do a Ceylonese chicken: It's got coconut milk, ginger, cilantro, curry, and cinnamon. We do a shrimp and crab etouffee, a Cajun thing over rice, that's really good.

I let the chefs create the menus. Our chefs, if they're good at a certain thing, we'll say 'How about you do that today?' We like to make most of the stuff ourselves. I think people come to us because of that. It's that Whole Foods theory—it's better if it doesn't have a whole big list of ingredients. It's basic food that's fresh.”



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