

All the glittering prizes at O'Connell's Craft Butchers

NOW trading for 100 years, 2011 has turned out to be a spectacular year for P. O'Connell's Craft Butchers. Based in a landmark building on Little Catherine Street, this butcher's dedication to great meats, great service and innovative products has paid handsomely in prizes and accolades. Owned and run by brother and sister team Jean and Paul Craughan, both working there for 35 years, they took over from their father Philip who bought out the business a good 60 years ago.

"We kept the name O'Connell's out of goodwill and tradition," Jean says, "but made this butcher shop our own".

Multi-award winning

Success and busy loyal custom has followed their careful direction. This year alone O'Connell Craft Butchers won 1st prize for its Limerick Ham with the Associated Craft Butchers of Ireland and also took a gold for its Spiced Beef from the ACBI. In January, O'Connell's took pride of place in Bridgestone Irish Food Guide 2011 of recommended places in which to shop for food.

Naturally, the Craughans are chuffed to make the prestigious 624-page Bridgestone Irish Food Guides 2008 to 2011, bible of delicatessens, markets, pubs, butchers and artisan food shops. Jean refers to the product variety sold at Little Catherine Street:

"As well as the usual meats, we sell our own dishes - Thai chicken, a chicken with stuffing and apple & Mexican sauce, lamb torpedoes flavoured with mint & garlic, individual beef & Guinness pies, lamb chops in a mint marinade. Take home what you like, all you have to do is put them in a hot oven".

Bridgestone Irish Food Guide 2011



Celebrity chef Nevin Maguire chaired the 2011 ACBI panel that favoured O'Connell's meats over all competition.

Actually, The Bridgestone Irish Food Guide (9th edition) lists P O'Connell Butchers of Little Catherine Street for the fourth year, thanks to O'Connell's "presentation, service and of course, product," Paul. "We have a pork shop and a beef shop and everything we sell is local, sourced from Limerick and surrounding counties. We also kill our own beef and the staff I have are with me, for the most part, between 25 and 35 years".

Awesome stuff when you consider the 'cultural capital' that these master butchers gather and pass on to we the customer in expertly nurtured meats.

Accolades from Associated Craft Butchers

This October, Paul was a proud man when the company won Gold in the Ready To Eat category of the ACBI Speciality Foods Competition with its Limerick Cooked Ham. All the judges are members of the Irish Guild of Food Writers and they remarked that "the standard in these competitions goes up every year. The innovation, skills and product knowledge among butchers is very impressive, and of course, the competition is fierce. We loved the cooked ham from O'Connell's, and it was a unanimous choice."



Thumbs up from Nevin Maguire

The competition, which is run by Associated Craft Butchers of Ireland, attracted 50 per cent more entries this year and has three categories, Ready to Eat, Ready to Heat and Ready to Cook. This Limerick family firm was up against plenty of competition.

"The chairman of the judging panel for this year was Nevin Maguire, which indicates the good standard of this award," Jean feels. "Nevin commented on the wealth of food knowledge among the Craft Butchers of Ireland, O'Connells being one of them, using traditional recipes, first class product, and the butchering skills handed down through generations".

Gold for Spiced Beef 2011

Traditionally a Limerick and Cork speciality, spiced beef is a beast all its own. Butcher Antón Togher, working with the Craughans for 25 years, takes us through the alchemy from local beef cut to national award winning delicacy.

"All our beef is locally sourced and dry aged for 21 days for us before it enters the shop. Then we soak it in a brine of our own condiments for up to a month. Then we take it out, dry it off and roll it in spices, on and off, for another month.

By the end of this curing process, we have up to an inch coating of spices wrapped around the beef, all the flavours penetrating the meat. This makes for a delicious depth and tenderness of flavour".

Cooking spiced beef

OK, we're won over. But how to you cook this Christmas dish? Antón knows best:

"Wrap it in tinfoil and slow simmer, half an hour to the pound. Then you can

unwrap it and carve out the beef but what we like to do at O'Connell's is place it in Guinness, and render down slowly until the stock is sticky and treacled. Then serve cold".

Magnificent, and ideal food to have in the fridge at home for homecoming family and guests. Serve a cut with chutney and a glass of wine or stout, and apologise to nobody for your quality of Irish hospitality. O'Connell's Craft Butcher's spiced beef knocks the oily taint off smoked salmon any day.



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Christmas at O'Connell's Craft Butchers

More than the goose is getting fat at Little Catherine Street as the range of traditional poultry and meats for Yuletide is stocked.

Jean Craughan takes us through the farmyard feathers: "We have organic turkeys that are locally sourced and we have free range turkeys and farm fresh turkeys. Naturally we have our own cured green and smoked hams and we stock free range duck and free range geese. Our Gold 2011 winning spiced beef is the house speciality".

Tom Reale, craft butcher with O'Connell's for 35 years, mentions a new gadget given out free to every customer who buys a turkey from O'Connell's.

"It's a turkey thermometer to ensure the safe cooking through of the bird. Lodge it deep into the thigh meat and the thermometer pops up when the bird is cooked".

Thanks be to God. No more doubts and delays as to this principal roast of the year from here on in. Only from O'Connell's.

Turkey butterfly crown

Enough? Not enough for these craft butchers. Customise Christmas fare at your table by ordering a turkey butterfly crown which is all white breast meat with the bone taking out. O'Connell's craft butchers will stuff it for free for you with their own sage and onion stuffing or



turkey with that. No extra charge," Jean says.

Christmas club

Clock these obliging opening hours for customers on Friday December 23 and Christmas Eve, Saturday 24 for turkey/meats collection:

Friday 23, 6am to 9pm; Saturday 24, 6am to 1pm. Tel. 061-414819 with orders and enquiries and 'like' O'Connell's Craft Butchers on facebook.

"We take care of the customers, while the orders are being prepared," says Paul, "giving out teas, mincepies and a hot

Note the Christmas club available to everybody at O'Connell's. Chip in as much or as little as you like anytime you are in town or make a purchase here, and the kitty built up over the year deflates the cost of getting in provisions at Christmas. The club is popular with customers and makes light work of this time of year.

Black Angus steaks

This craft butchers has a real niche with Limerick people for the outstanding quality of its fare. Refer to the 2011 competition wins, and indeed,

those dating back to previous year's for external validation. Jean gives special mention to their Black Angus steaks, cut to any specification and the meat is dry aged for at least 21 days. Team with a rich potato gratin, available daily here.

Now visit the pork and chicken shop to suss how other meats are prepared and cured. Try plump ribs as they are or buy them sticky and sweet. Choose chicken breast in batter or

marinated in Cantonese sauce, baby corn and veg for instant stirfry. Make off with a beef & Guinness pie, or stuffed chicken fillets skewered with a bacon jacket, or a luscious roast pork stuffed with prunes, cheese and beef tomatoes. There's even packet and tripe, which sells by the trayful every day.

Award winning cooked meats

Listen to Antón Togher talk about the time and care put into the cooked meats counter. These boys are not craft butchers for nothing.

"Every day on the premises we cook our own ham, roast beef and turkey. Then we carve the meats off the bone, fresh to the customer. And that's daily. The meats and poultry are sourced locally, the ham is our own. There is nothing processed and look, we have the medals to show for the quality of our cooked produce".

Looking at and sampling the layers of carved turkey breast and lean roast beef, this stuff is the real goat's toe. Flavours are true and deep, the meat succulent.

Whether it is rack of lamb you want, or a stuffed turkey with free thermometer, or simply the best mince steak in town (a refrigerated mincer ensures immaculate hygiene), O'Connell's Craft Butchers can provide and advise. Make friends with this likeable crew at Little Catherine Street. Tel. 061-414819.



opt for sausage stuffing - this house has a cracking range of flavoured sausages too. Pick up a few dozen for instant, fragrant sizzle at parties and after winter walks.

"You can even bring in your own stuffing and we'll stuff the

punch with no booze. It's good craic and there is always good banter over the counter with staff".

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