

Agrarian Artistry Meets Culinary Talent in Upstate New York

by Annette Nielsen

Shushan, NY – International celebrity Chef Jason Roberts has been working with Key Private Bank over the past two years, touring many of the communities Key Private Bank serves. Through his visits, Chef Roberts has worked to promote health-conscious food preparation with the use of local ingredients, has created special dinners for Key Private Bank clients, and shared his cooking knowledge with community groups.

“Key Private Bank sees working with Chef Roberts as an excellent way to highlight the bank’s commitment to helping people make good financial decisions that enhance the quality of their lives,” states Ruth Mahoney, Senior Vice President, Key Private Bank.

This New Zealand born and Australian raised chef has been a regular on ABCs “Good Morning America”, is a cookbook author, and has led a cooking show on Australian television, called ‘Fresh’. His advocacy for sourcing from local farms and farmers comes from his experience as a young person growing up on a dairy farm. He’s acutely aware of what’s in season and states that buying fresh and local foods can help families eat well and healthfully, pointing out that it’s less expensive purchasing food that’s in season and it tastes better.

While on a recent visit to the Capital District, Key Private Bank kept Chef Roberts busy. On a stop at the Franklin Community Center in Saratoga Springs, he taught mothers and others some tricks for making healthful snacks for children. He created a fine dining experience for an invitation-only event highlighting Key Private Bank clients. He whipped up smoothies from fresh (and locally grown) berries at a Key Bank branch office, and visited some stellar representations of our local agrarians and artisans on a farm tour facilitated by Saratoga P.L.A.N. (Preserving Land and Nature), a not-for-profit land trust and planning advocacy group in Saratoga County.

During his trip to 3-Corner Field Farm in Shushan, the chef was able to see the milking parlor where the ewes are milked and the cheese making room, the lush fields on bucolic hillsides where the sheep are rotationally grazed, and he took a tour of the natural stone aging room for the delicious varieties of cheese. He also learned about the solar initiatives the farm’s owners, Paul Borghard and Karen Weinberg, have pursued to keep their farm sustainable.

After the tour, Chef Roberts had the opportunity to sample the great cheese and yogurt created using the milk from the sheep, paired with neighboring Murray Hollow Bakers brick-oven baked artisan bread. The chef, impressed with the pairing, thought that both the cheese and bread should be served at the upcoming Key Private Bank dinner event in Saratoga, and requested a visit to Murray Hollow Bakers to observe artisan bread baker Doug Rountree at work.

A later stop at Winney's Farm in Schuylerville to sample and pick blueberries allowed the chef to speak to Byron Winney. Winney's family started farming along the Hudson River as far back as the 17th century, and he provided an animated tour of the family farm and its 17 varieties of blueberries, just hitting their peak.

Saratoga P.L.A.N.'s Chair, Julie Stokes, stated, "It was great to offer a glimpse of the wonderful representations of diverse agrarian pursuits to such an appreciative audience – Chef Roberts is certainly aligned with our mission, and understands the importance of protecting regional farmland."

The farm tour for Chef Roberts highlighted two of the farms participating in Saratoga P.L.A.N.'s upcoming annual *Feast of the Fields* event that pairs 15 regional chefs with over 30 local farmers and producers. Events like these strengthen the ties between our area restaurants and farms, promoting sustainable agriculture and supporting the regional economy.

Tickets for the Feast of the Fields event are \$150 per person.