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**NATURE REFINED**  
**Monroe Arts Center Presents “A Taste of Spring”**

MONROE, WI – Chef C. Ryan Boughton of Peppercorn Banquets celebrates fresh flavors and a fresh perspective on Monroe Arts Center’s future of serving the community.

Monroe Arts Center’s much-anticipated “A Taste of Spring” event is set for Monday, May 2 from 5:00 pm to 9:00 pm at Ludlow Mansion and the timing couldn’t be better. Not only will the chef be able to incorporate the fresh flavors of the awakening season for an evening themed “Nature Refined” – he also views this dinner as an ideal way to provide momentum in a rebirth of MAC itself as the doors will soon open to the new addition.

After being asked to lead the culinary efforts of the evening, Chef C. Ryan Boughton found himself engaged in a three-hour menu discussion with fellow chef Carlo Pasquino, and MAC director Richard Daniels, culminating in a six-course, ingredient-driven menu. “Once you know what you’ll be using, you need to put it together in a format that will sing,” said Boughton, who thoroughly enjoys the challenge of menu development and noted that the discussion could have gone on much longer.

Boughton, who served as guest chef at A Taste of Spring several years ago, was pleased to be asked back for an encore. This time, instead of transporting everything in from a different location (like the restaurant he used to work at in Galena), he’ll be right at home at Monroe’s Peppercorn Banquets. “There’s a certain comfort level in the familiarity of cooking onsite as opposed to working in someone else’s kitchen,” said Boughton, who appreciates the opportunity to deviate from the tedium of repeating the same meals over and over again as restaurant chefs often do.

Regional produce and locally-sourced, early spring staples will provide the foundation for the evening’s repast – mushrooms, onions, Swiss chard – along with pheasant, trout

and regional cheeses. So it's a bit of a rustic menu, but more refined in both preparation and presentation.

The starter for the evening features a light puff pastry "purse" with tastes of smoked trout, squash, and Fontina from Maple Leaf Cheese Cooperative in Monroe.

For the second course Chef Boughton will present a "deconstructed salad" on a skewer, with flavors of the Mediterranean – including olives and roasted peppers along with Odyssey feta and a vinaigrette using Greek yogurt from Monroe's Klondike Cheese Company. A grilled baguette on the side completes the dish.

Boughton seems particularly pleased with his plans for the intermezzo course. Generally a musical term, he uses it in a similar way – but instead of bridging the gap between musical selections, his intermezzo will provide the transition between courses. Diners who might expect the traditional palette-cleansing sorbet will instead be delighted with a whimsical Popsicle. Created for adults, this Popsicle is all about Wisconsin's Door County, with tastes of cherries, bitters, and whiskey from Death's Door Spirits on Washington Island. The whiskey itself has hints of dark cherry and vanilla, and Boughton expects the marriage of the ingredients to create, in chef-speak, a "synergy in the flavor profile."

Diners will also be experiencing the distinct flavors of an old "farmhouse preservation" technique with the main course featuring confit of pheasant. The meat is essentially preserved and cooked in its own fat. A visually impressive highlight of the main course will be the Hasselback potato – at heart a baked potato, but with a series of layered slices creating "lots of caramelization and crispy parts." Boughton plans to season it with thyme and enhance the flavor with goose fat.

A quick and light fifth course will pair an onion cracker with Emmi Roth's Grand Cru Surchoix – recently honored as winner of the 2016 World Championship Cheese Contest. It will be topped with apple and bramble "membrillo" – a Spanish term referring to a sweet preserve that has been thickened to allow for cutting into "smooth and slightly jiggly" shapes.

A Taste of Spring dinner finishes with panna cotta (an Italian classic using goat cheese from Montchevré in nearby Belmont, Wisconsin) served with pineapple crisp and drizzled with rosemary caramel. As with past events, a series of fine wines will accompany the courses.

The event includes a live auction with offerings ranging from fine art to metal works and themed dinners; and a silent auction with a variety of one-of-a-kind items including maple syrup, wine, cheese, chocolate, and artisan creations in jewelry, textiles, and wood.

Monroe Arts Center invites you to support their amazing entertainment offerings and engaging exhibits by attending “A Taste of Spring” on May 2. Individual tickets are \$85 and tables of eight are \$550. For reservations (by April 22) call 608-325-5700. Visit [monroeartscenter.com](http://monroeartscenter.com) for information.

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PHOTO:

2016 Chef Ryan Boughton

PHOTO CAPTION:

When he isn't in the kitchen at Peppercorn Banquets or exploring new ways to cook over an open fire, Chef C. Ryan Boughton shares his culinary talents through several causes that are near to his heart. The Driftless Farm and Food Weekend in Dubuque, Iowa, starts with school tours (kids get to spend a day at an area farm to gain an appreciation of where food comes from) and ends with a fund raiser farm-to-table dinner benefitting food-related causes. Boughton is also involved with the Rooted Chef program at the Dubuque Rescue Mission where he teaches low income and underemployed individuals basics like gardening, food handling and knife skills, followed by an eight-week course in the kitchen learning how to cook. Working alongside real chefs, the students produce one of the courses for the Driftless dinner. Boughton says students leave the program more qualified to pursue a position in a restaurant, along with having the opportunity to network and learn about job possibilities in the culinary field.