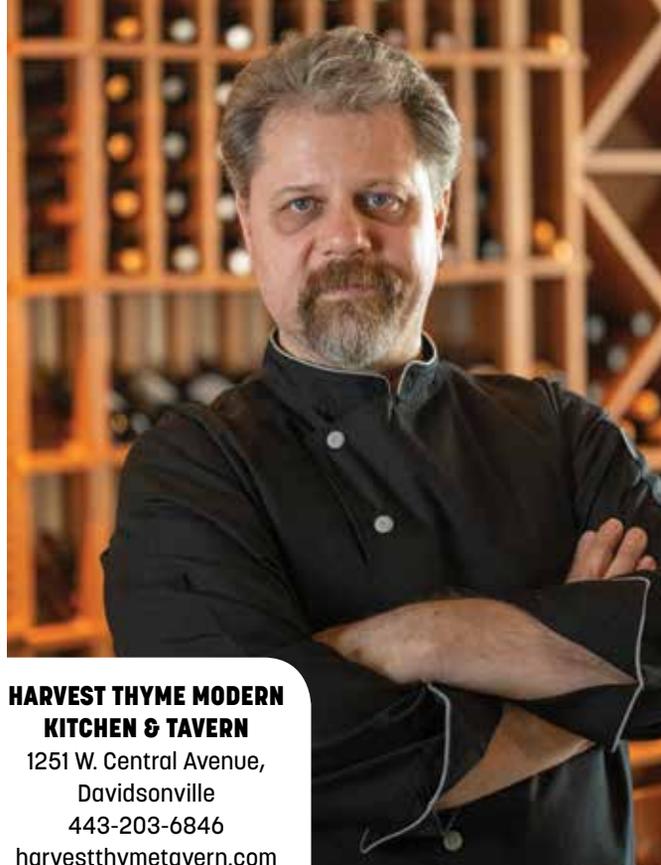


# World-Class in Davidsonville

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## HARVEST THYME MODERN KITCHEN & TAVERN

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**R**estaurants run in Rik Squillari's family blood. At one point, his family owned five of them in Frederick and Western Maryland. Squillari spent four decades working in restaurants and the wine industry, and that combination provided him with invaluable experience when he decided to open Harvest Thyme Modern Kitchen & Tavern in Davidsonville nearly four years ago.

"Finding someone that has the restaurant *and* the wine experience is hard," says Squillari, a graduate of the Culinary Institute of America in New York. "You will find people that know more about wine than I do, but very few of them have worked in the restaurant business."

Harvest Thyme built its menu around Italian, but also features Asian, French, and Low-country cuisine. "It's got roots of Italian, but we like to do seasonal," Squillari says.

Squillari acquired his extensive wine expertise traveling around the world to wineries while working for a distributor, and he uses the knowledge to maintain and create an eclectic wine list at this restaurant.



His wines range in price from \$14 to \$500 per bottle. Harvest Thyme has plenty of wine on display in the dining room so customers can have their pick.

We recently sat down with the 53-year-old Squillari, a Crofton resident, to talk about his work experience, Harvest Thyme's best-selling dishes, his family background in food, and trying to attract customers from around the region.

### What inspired you to open the restaurant?

I grew up in the business. My family owned restaurants when I was a child. We had the old school drive-in when we lived in Frederick. My great uncle, Anton, owned two inns in Western Maryland. He also owned two other restaurants and my dad, Eugino, took over one of them. My great uncle decided to open a third restaurant. When he passed away, my dad took over his other restaurants.

### Were your family members chefs?

Neither one of them really had a certification or went to a culinary school. For them, it was more of the school of hard knocks. To me, a chef is someone who is actually there, making things from scratch, being able to run a business, and manage the finances. It's being able to do more than just cook.

### So, it was natural for you to become a chef?

I think so. Part of it was proving my dad wrong. As a teenager, I wasn't the perfect child everyone dreams of having. I liked to go out and play and push the limits. My dad is old school from Northern Italy and grew up during World War II. So that mentality is pretty hard compared to how we handle our children now-a-days. I got accepted to a couple of fairly nice business schools, but I decided I just wanted to go to culinary school. He

gave me three weeks before I was going to come back home. He didn't think I was going to make it.

### **What places did you work previously? Did that experience help with opening a restaurant?**

When it came to cooking experience, the most I learned was at Tropicana Hotel and Casino in Atlantic City. I was hired right out of culinary school. I was 20. I went to work in their upscale French restaurant called Le Paris. I also made myself available to work in the hotel's other restaurants. I also worked in their upscale steak house and Italian restaurant. I did banquets, worked in the bake shop, and coffee shop.

### **How would you describe your menu?**

About 90 percent of it is made from scratch. We do Pacific Rim. When we do wine dinners, we match them with particular countries and producers. I would say Italian is probably the core and we branch out from there. I call it modern American food because it grabs flavors from all over the world. We use as much local food as possible: seafood, produce, and meats.

### **What is your top-selling dish?**

Chicken Milanese. It's lightly basted chicken served with pasta. The pasta is tossed with a lemon, butter, fresh basil, marinated tomato sauce. We get a lot of compliments on it.

### **What's another customer favorite?**

The Pork Belly. We marinate for about 24 hours and slow cook it for about eight.

Then we fry it with a wild berry compost. It's rich and decadent. You will taste all four flavor senses.

### **How did you become a wine importer?**

I was working at the Wood Fire Grill in Severna Park. It was getting to the point where I had to move on. There was no upward movement. I knew a wholesaler who had a rep who was covering southern Maryland and Washington, D.C. One of the suppliers said this company was looking for someone to help them nationally. The company was an importer as well as a wholesaler in California. So that's how I got hooked up with wines.

### **Describe your wine selections. What do you have that others may not?**

When it comes to wines, I do a lot of buying based on what the customers like. I look for quality at every price point. I definitely shop for deals to get good values. Across the board, I like a lot of things. I like white wines from Alsace of Western France and Alto Adige from Northern Italy. For our size, we carry a lot more than most places. I tend stay away from big brand items because they don't represent the best quality for value.

### **Is your décor and wine related?**

Yes it is. Instead of having a room for storage to put all my wine and liquor in, I have wine racks and shelving to display my storage right there in the dining room. People can go look at it and see what we have. It is one of our unique features.



## **Pear and Ricotta Stuffed Sacchetti**

*Serves 1*

### **Ingredients**

8 oz. Sacchetti (fresh pasta stuffed with pear and ricotta, available through gourmet grocers/markets)  
2 oz. Julienne prosciutto

### **Basil Cream Sauce**

1/2 tsp. Shallots (finely chopped)  
Clarified butter (just enough to coat bottom of pan)  
1/2 oz. Brandy  
1/2 oz. Chiffonade of fresh basil  
3 oz. Cream  
Pinch salt and pepper (to taste as prosciutto can be salty)  
1 Tbsp. Butter

### **Directions**

In hot sauté pan add butter. Lightly sauté shallots, add prosciutto until lightly browned. Deglaze with brandy and reduce until almost dry. Add heavy cream, salt, and pepper, and reduce until nappe (thick enough to coat the back of a spoon without running together). In boiling water, add pasta and cook until tender, approximately 2 minutes. Drain excess water and add pasta to sauce. Reduce slightly more and swirl in whole butter. Serve.

### **You're located in Davidsonville? How do attract customers from out of the area?**

We are looking to expand our consumer base beyond the community. Davidsonville has been very good in supporting us and helping us build our business. But I feel we have things to offer to those in the Greater Annapolis, Baltimore, and D.C. region. We would be a nice alternative and you don't have to pay for parking. We have to attract customers by word of mouth and advertising.

### **Do you give back to the community through fundraisers?**

We did a fundraiser in December for the Davidsonville Athletic Association and juvenile diabetes. We got a lot of support and between the two, we raised about \$12,000. I think we will do it every year. We also did The Wendy Walk and it's to support MS in April, and one for Gigi's Playhouse.