

TIP OF MY TONGUE

Petaluma cheese with your wine

Besides serving excellent wine, Barber Cellars is dedicating their Washington Street wine tasting room to something that Petaluma does better than most other wine country towns; cheese.

Highlighting local producers, Barber now offers flights of cheese paired with salami and prosciutto from Zoe's Meats, McEvoy olives and Cowgirl Creamery crackers.

When a place carries local favorites like Zoe's, McEvoy and Cowgirl, instead of far-off national brands, you know they are paying attention to the community.

Barber will even start hosting a monthly cheese maker night, where patrons can meet the cheese makers behind our great local cheeses.

Barber's flights, also known as Poughman's Platters, are \$16 and are perfect for two or three people to share while tasting Michael and Lorraine's wines.

The cheese selection will change monthly but will be available in three basic themes. The first focuses on a single cheese maker, the second is a three-animal mix, and the third is a miscellaneous selection of local cheeses.

This month's cheese maker focus is on Petaluma's own Dacheva Son's. This includes a brie, a raw jersey milk cheddar and an aged garlic cheddar.

The three-animal platter is Bohemian's "Poco Loco" (buffalo), Redwood Hill's "Crottin" (goat) and Bleating Heart's "Fat Bottom Girl" (sheep). The mixed bag is Cowgirl's "Redhawk," Bohemian's "Bollo Belle" and Bleating Heart's "Ewelicious blue."

The next 'hard' drug?

As long as we are talking about cheese, there was a recent and somewhat bizarre news report that scientists have discovered a drug-like protein in cheese. Casein is a tiny milk protein that attaches to our brain's opiate receptors, much like morphine and heroin do, causing a euphoric and calming effect.

But because it takes roughly 10 pounds of milk to make one pound of cheese, the concentrated levels of casein help explain why you'll get more of a buzz off the holiday

cheese platter than the eggnog, unless it's spiked, of course.

We Americans certainly like our cheese, eating an estimated 35 pounds

of it each year. This quantity of consumption, coupled with these addictive revelations, will inevitably lead to anti-cheese public policy initiatives intended to stem childhood obesity. However, I encourage us all to stay the course.

Remember not

that long ago when salt, fat and wine were bad for us? It is all about moderation and consuming the right kind, and I think we all know that Point Reyes Farmstead's Blue, Marin French's Brie and Achadinha's Capricious and Feta are the right kind of cheeses to be consuming in large doses. At least that is what my taste buds are telling me, and they never lie.

All of this does have me wondering though, if cheese is like a drug, is hard cheese like a hard drug? Should I have a designated driver the next time I visit Nicasio Valley Cheese Company's tasting room, or should I just lie when the cop pulls me over and asks how much cheese I consumed prior to driving?

In other intoxicating news, Match.com recently browsed its users' profiles looking for drinking-related information.

After mapping this data geographically who should pop up in at the number two spot for the top "booziest cities" but Santa Rosa/Petaluma, sandwiched between first place Austin, Texas and third place New Orleans.

Having great wineries, breweries and distilleries peppering our region certainly helped bring us towards the top of the list.

A saucy service fee

Sauced, a barbecue joint that opened in Petaluma this past year, will do away with tipping by year's end, instead adding a mandatory service charge of 20 percent to in-house dining bills. Proponents say this type of pricing model helps raise wages, equalize pay between the front and back of house staffs and allows restaurants to offer more benefits.

Opponents claim this takes away a server's incentive to give good ser-

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vice. The middle ground is simply to pay their kitchen staff better. Naturally, this is built into the cost of the meal, but at least it doesn't come as a surprise added on at the end of the meal.

Surprisingly, there are many servers that don't like this type of model because they see it as

unfairly penalizing them by redistributing their hard-earned tips to the back of house. Patrons also seem a bit flustered with the forced service charge when there is no guarantee of quality service.

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