

AND THE *last word* goes to...



This month our 'Local Influencer' is a team effort – The Warren restaurant in Tunbridge Wells, which during lockdown has been preparing and delivering meals to a local community larder. Here, The Warren's general manager Magdalena Szczerbova tells us more about the initiative...

In November St Matt's Church in High Brooms launched its Community Larder to meet a growing need in the local community: Why did you become involved in the initiative, and have you been surprised at the uptake?

"We have been wanting to support the community for some time now as sitting at home seems to compound your feeling of inadequacy at not being able to help, especially when it is plainly obvious that so many people are in need. We approached Liz at St Matt's and they were happy to collaborate with us – we were delighted.

"It has been a genuine surprise just how immense the demand is, the queue is over 100m long every week. When distributing the prepared meals we get the chance to talk to the community, there is such a vast range of people who need support – from struggling business owners, working single parents and furloughed households who are battling to put food on the table. Everyone is so grateful and it is an honour to be able to help at all."

What meals have you been preparing and where do you get the ingredients – are they donated?

"The food has not been to our normal Michelin guide style of gastronomy, we have kept it simple and tasty, a proper home cooked meal. Our incredible head chef Dave Friend prepared beef stewed in red wine, then fantastic Andras Roflics, our sous chef, made vadas, which is a Hungarian game stew, and our great independent chef Oran Tait made pork in cider.

"We are incredibly fortunate in the fact we have the estate in Crowborough where incidentally all the free-range produce comes from. We have cattle, sheep, poultry, and a whole range of different eggs so the chefs have been rather busy in the kitchen.

"Martin Haymes, owner of The Warren restaurant, gave the green light for the collaboration as he too wanted to contribute to the local neighbourhood. Donating the produce has been immensely rewarding for all of us involved and has given us a great sense of community spirit."

"With the help of our vegetarian team member Paul Parkinson we have also been delivering vegan dishes so there has been a home cooked meal for everyone! The growing number of plant-based eaters is definitely something we are taking in our stride as it is important to not leave anyone out."

With the roadmap to lifting lockdown in place, where are you most looking forward to visiting locally to relax, catch up with family and friends, and dine and drink?

"I support local, independent venues as much as I can and so does my team. We are fans of cocktails at Coco Retro and also the Claremont Pub for a team debrief! Rendez-Vous has served me some amazing hearty meals so I'm very much looking forward to the reopening along with pastries from The Bicycle Bakery and oysters and caviar from Sankey's at The Old Fish Market and the celebratory dinners in Thackeray's!"

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