

Kristie and Niall Campbell with Camden

-- SUSTAINABLE DINING --

Market Rally

After spending years away, an Effingham native is now home, married to a chef and ready to prove that fine dining doesn't require much of a journey.

On a 4-acre farm in Effingham, heirloom tomatoes grow plump near ruffly organic lettuces and delicate herbs. The ingredients will soon start their journey to the table. A few steps later, they'll be there—starring in dishes at Firefly Grill, supporting Niall and Kristie Campbell's goal of caring for the land as well as their customers.

What the Campbells don't grow, they find through sustainable sources, including area farmers and foragers. "From the day we opened 12 years ago, we've welcomed relationships with people who randomly knock on the back door," Niall says.

"A lot of our success has to do with supporting our community and being open to new possibilities," Kristie adds.

That openness brought the pair together and led them to Effingham. Kristie was born there but landed in Boston, where she worked as an equities trader. States away, Niall was headed overseas for a chef job. The events of 9/11 upended their lives. In the aftermath of the attacks, the two met while visiting mutual friends in Puerto Rico.

Kristie and Niall later married (on a September 11) and moved to San Francisco, but an opportunity to open a restaurant lured them to Kristie's hometown. Their

family now includes 6-year-old daughter Camden, and their roots reach deep in a place that connects them to the land and its people.

At Firefly Grill, Niall and a tight-knit crew work in an open kitchen within an ag-modern structure of recycled steel and old barnwood. A pond irrigates the pesticide-free gardens. Even the restaurant's name celebrates nature. Kristie remembers waking from a dream about her grandmother: "When I was little, I used to catch fireflies in Nina's backyard. She would put them in mason jars, set them on the screen porch where we slept and sing us to sleep," she says. "I sat up in bed and said, 'Firefly—that's it!'"

Diners enjoy seasonal favorites, such as butternut squash soup topped with apple chutney, spiced glazed ribs bathed in coconut broth, and creamy pumpkin ice cream. Garden sweet corn enhances the popular fried green tomatoes. And an elevated kids menu includes shells and cheese made with Parmesan and cream from Kilgus Farmstead in Fairbury.

Visitors are always encouraged to take a pre-meal walk through the farm where, Kristie says, "people can stroll through the ingredients that will be on their plates."

MAKE A RUN TO FALL FARMERS MARKETS

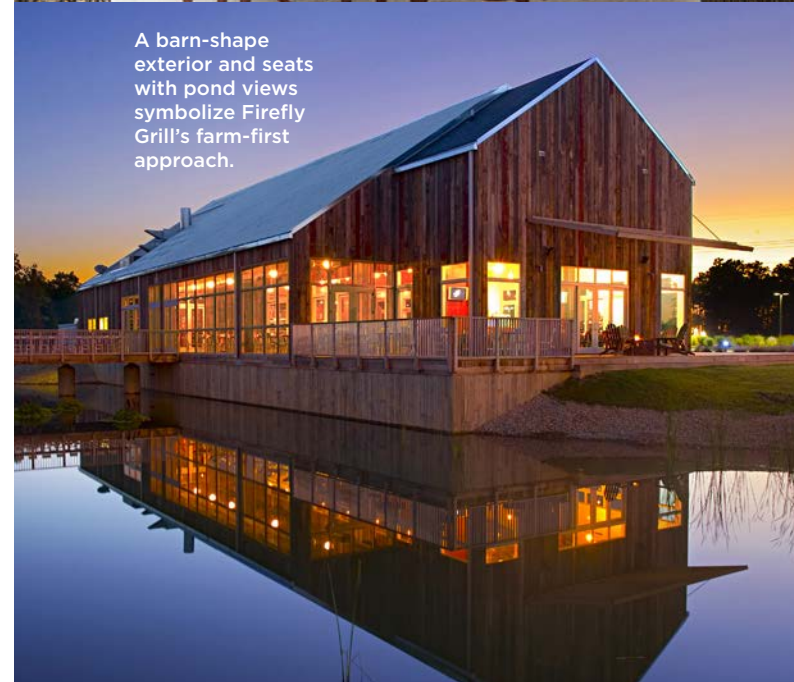
THE LAND CONNECTION CHAMPAIGN FARMERS MARKET
Champaign
Vendors sell produce, cheeses, breads and flowers downtown amid live entertainment and family activities (Tuesdays through October).

EFFINGHAM FARMERS MARKET
Effingham
Artists, crafters and musicians join growers outside the 1872 Effingham County Courthouse Museum (Saturdays through October).

AURORA FARMERS MARKET
Aurora
Open since 1912, the market offers fresh-picked produce, preserves, cheeses and baked goods, plus crafts for kids (Saturdays through mid-October).

GREEN CITY MARKET
Chicago
Look for chef-led demos and kids' classes (Wednesdays and Saturdays in Lincoln Park, through October; Saturdays in the West Loop, through October; select Thursday evenings in Wrigleyville, through September; Saturdays at Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum, November to April).

STORY: KIT BERNARDI. PHOTOGRAPHS: IOT. (FAMILY) TYTIA HABING



A barn-shape exterior and seats with pond views symbolize Firefly Grill's farm-first approach.

