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A bit of Ireland comes to downtown Norfolk

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Grace O'Malley's chicken wings were tender and flavorful with a delightful texture. There were no leftovers to take home.



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When in an Irish pub like Grace O'Malley's, you order bangers and mash, right? These sausages were plump and pleasing, the onions and gravy excellent, and the mashed potatoes on-the-money.



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At Grace O'Malley's, two hearty filets of cod were battered and fried and served with their "chips," which are thick, hand cut and house-made from russet potatoes.

I've never been to Ireland, but it looks verdant, folksy and friendly in all the movies I've seen. When Grace O'Malley's Irish Pub and Restaurant finally opened on Granby Street in late July, I figured that was a trip within my travel budget.

Maybe Ireland looks a lot like downtown Norfolk, because the woodwork, bar and storefront that were handmade and imported from Ireland fit right into the neighborhood. The attractive tile-work at the entrance and the rich green exterior paint contrast nicely with the warm reddish-brown tones of the wood. Soft golden yellow walls imbue the interior with sunshine and keep the dark wood from becoming overbearing. There's a stage for entertainment and a large screen for projecting sporting events ... a big draw for pubs, I am told.

Pal Jeff and I entered for a late lunch, and it was pretty empty. No matter. We bellied up to the bar and were welcomed by Erin (of course) who chatted us through the menu. She told us that the chicken wings were exceptional, and we agreed.

The wings are prepared in a whiskey sauce and arrived caramelized and golden with flecks of parsley and a dish of ranch and blue cheese dipping sauce. The wings were moist and tender, but the skin was a delightful combination of chewiness with a slight snap.

I chose fish and chips, and found the cod filets generous in size, lightly battered and expertly fried. The crunchy breading is a simple mix of self-rising flour, soda water and a bit of beer. The thick hand-cut "chips," made from russet potatoes, were a little less cooked than I prefer, but nicely seasoned.

A traditional plate of bangers and mash was on Jeff's bucket list. Three plump

and savory grilled sausages sat atop a mound of tasty potatoes, dressed with glossy brown gravy and translucent caramelized onions with a small side of baked beans.

There's plenty of scotch and whiskey to whet your whistle, as well as 15 beers on tap. Guinness is poured from a nitro tap that delivers the perfect pint, a creamy brew with a thick white fluffy head.

Somewhere after the wings and before the entrees, a fellow came in and sat a few seats from us at the bar. He ordered his pint and sat quietly until he heard Jeff mention that he was planning a trip to Maine with his wife.

"I went to maritime school there," he said. "I can tell you anything you want to know about the area." I didn't get his name, but he offered invaluable insight into planning their trip.

And that's what Irish pubs are all about. Friendly conversations with random strangers. Over a pint. Or two.

Open at 11 a.m. daily, until midnight Sunday through Thursday and until 2 a.m. Friday and Saturday. Live Irish folk music Tuesday through Thursday beginning at 8 p.m., Friday and Saturday beginning at 9 p.m.

Grace O'Malley's, 211 Granby St., Norfolk, 757-333-3330, irishpubnorfolk.com

I attended a slider cook-off in January at O'Connor Brewing among four chefs. The winner was Chef David "Regular" Hannah of Press 626. The tomato jam on his slider sent it right to the top of my list.

Hannah is no longer with Press 626. He's launched a business making that delicious tomato jam as well as a few other unique condiments and pickles soon to become staples in my pantry.

Hannah makes sweet tomato jam, kimchi, jalapeno pepper jelly, mixed berry jam, pickled mustard seeds, sweet pepper jelly and strawberry jam with fresh ingredients from local farms. He's calling them "universal" condiments because they can be used in so many ways.

I asked him about the "Regular" in his name. Seems his friends at Norfolk State gave him the nickname because he was always laid back and chill, a regular kind of guy. And it stuck.

Now it's also his business name: Regular Chef Home Made Jams. His concoctions are sold on his website, regularchefjams.etsy.com, and at Pendulum

Fine Meats in Norfolk, all three Tinto Wine and Cheese locations and Rusty Cottage on Shore Drive in Virginia Beach.

You can learn the art of jamming from Hannah in a class at Pendulum to be announced in October.

He and his wife, Krystal, are expecting their first child any day now. Perhaps baby food will be the next item on the Regular Chef lineup.

Regular Chef Home Made Jams, regularchefjams.etsy.com,
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One of the most fun, creative and delicious food festivals I attended last year is coming up again.

On Sept. 25, Farm to Fork takes place from 3 to 6 p.m. on the beautiful grounds of the Hampton Roads Agricultural Research and Extension Center on Diamond Springs Road in Virginia Beach.

Local chefs will serve their tastiest creations, made from fresh, local ingredients, to be enjoyed with Virginia wines and craft beers. The bluegrass band Hard Knox will perform.

Activities for the kids include a live farm display.

Advance tickets are \$40 (it's \$45 at the door) for adults, and include food tastings and two drink tickets for beer or wine. V.I.P. tickets are \$55 and score you tent seats and a commemorative drink glass. Water and lemonade will be available for those under 21; tickets for children are \$15, \$20 at the door.

You can take beach chairs and a blanket and stretch out on the lawn. This is a rain-or-shine event. Indoor facilities are available should Mother Nature feel weepy. Refunds will not be given.

For information and tickets, visit [www.buylocal hamptonroads.org](http://www.buylocalhamptonroads.org).

Send tips to Judy Cowling at [turningtables@ pilotonline.com](mailto:turningtables@pilotonline.com).