Where Comfort Lies

To think about comfort food in the way Tom envisions it, you would have to know Tom. Owner of Twiggs in St. Albans, Tom came to the restaurant business from a circuitous path. Raised in Philadelphia, PA, and a resident of St. Albans, VT, since 1999; the restauranteur, former wrestler, and founder of “Sweethearts and Heroes” says, “When I was 10, my bedroom was given to one of the dozens of homeless people my parents took in.” Tom’s parents had, he explained, started a self-funded mission, taking in people off the street. “I slept in the bathtub for a year.”

The 46-year-old multitalented Tom thought that’s how every family operated and each of those informally adopted family members, from the homeless pregnant woman to the addicted ex-convict, left an imprint on the youngster that continued into his adult life. “Everybody deserves to feel some kind of hope. That’s what I’m here to do.”

Now, with his wife, Wendi, and their four children, and among the staff and patrons of Twiggs who are clearly an extension of Tom’s family, Tom’s definition of comfort spans beyond the two-fisted burgers and maple bacon chicken entrees.

Jump ahead to a life that’s taken him from sleeping in a bathtub to a starring role on Spike TV’s Ultimate Fighting Championship, earning a degree in human psychology—summa cum laude—10 years as the brains and management behind RailAmerica’s national dispatching center based out of St. Albans, VT, and the formation of a nationally known and respected think tank “Sweethearts and Heroes,” which he founded with his childhood friend, Jason and Iraqi War veteran, Rick. Tom is a man of vision, deep gratitude, and an unbelievable amount of infectious energy.

“Possibilities exist,” he says matter-of-factly. “The war we're in is against hopelessness. Behavior is a form of hopelessness. When that shows up in kids, so do we.” That’s the kind of message Tom promotes when he and Rick travel the country giving talks to kids about how to recognize and prevent bullying. “Heroes take action,” he emphasizes. “It’s the difference between knowing something that needs to change and doing it. A hero does what others are unwilling to do.”

When the restauranteur was approached to support children and families in foster care by our St. Albans District Office staff, Tom said “yes” without hesitation.
Tom is quick to acknowledge the help of Performance Food Services’ Brian and Randy, of The Vermont Agency, both of whom kicked in funding to help cover food costs.

“They use their superpowers for good!” Tom said, echoing some of the same language and positivity he injects into everything he does. “They truly made this happen.”

And that’s what lead Tom and his allies to make an incredibly generous donation to foster families in the St. Albans District in recognition of National Foster Care Month in May. There are 75 active foster families in the St. Albans District. Twiggs, along with Performance Food Service and The Vermont Agency, are giving $100 gift cards to each of the 75 currently active foster homes in May. Thirty-one of those foster care providers will be featured on the Twiggs Facebook page throughout the month of May.

All of this experience, his core values, and the lessons he’s taken from people he grew up with, and the thousands of children he’s spoken with over the years, has culminated in Tom's philosophy of community service. “Our message is to create more hope, allow people to recognize themselves in others, create family, and provide hope.”

He even has the restaurant’s core values posted on its bathroom walls. Who does that?! Tom does. Food does that. So do the hearts and minds that prepare and serve it. That’s where comfort lies. And that’s the kind of experience Tom and the team at Twiggs want to give foster care providers who provide comfort and care to vulnerable children and youth every day.

To visit Twiggs, visit them at 24 North Main Street, St. Albans, VT, or go to www.twiggsvt.com.

To learn more about Sweethearts and Heroes, visit https://www.sweetheartsandheroes.com or www.facebook.com/sweetheartsandheroes.

To learn more about becoming a foster parent with Vermont Department for Children and Families (VDCF), its website: https://dcf.vermont.gov/foster