







# FRIDAY EVENING, CHIMNEY CORNERS

Dinner at Crystal Lake's most cherished family resort serves up old-timey favorites that are still oh-so now.

TEXT BY **EMILY TYRA** PHOTOGRAPHS BY **TODD ZAWISTOWSKI**

The dinner hour arrives at 6 p.m. at Chimney Corners Resort, summoning people from their posts on the Crystal Lake beach. They slip from swimsuits into sundresses or crisp khakis and, slick-haired from the lake, follow the curvy path up the bluff to the lodge. Even without a dinner bell proper, Chimney Corners' Friday night feast is the kind people are never late for.

From a table on the porch at the 100-year-old lodge, Chimney Corners matriarch Mollie Rogers waves hello to guests coming in—families staying at the resort plus a handful of folks from town.

Mollie, a born hostess, stirs a little sugar into her iced tea, and with a wit and familiarity that pour freely from her, tells the story of how the dinner we're about to eat came to be.

Leola and Olin Rogers, Mollie's parents-in-law, first cracked open the guestbook at Chimney Corners' main lodge in 1935. Olin, a former lumberman, was out of work in the midst

of the Great Depression. Desperate to generate income for their young family, the Rogerses turned their vacation home near Frankfort into a guesthouse for boarders. Leola oversaw the kitchen, creating wonderful Midwestern meals and presenting them gracefully for her guests. Even in the Depression era, she made sure there were rose petals in the finger bowls next to each plate.

"Maiden ladies, mostly retired school teachers, stayed the whole summer and took every meal here," says Mollie. The ladies became friends at the long mahogany table, working their way through bountiful meals, then rejuvenating with a rock on the porch. Mollie, then the new bride of Leola and Olin's son, Jim Rogers Sr., dove in, helping her mother-in-law in the kitchen.

"Traditions like the midday Sunday chicken dinners were unwavering," says Mollie. "We made Michigan fried chicken. Unlike Southern fried chicken,

which is deep fried the whole time, we'd fry it then put it in the oven and finish it. It makes it a little lighter ... or I keep hoping," she says. "I enjoyed cooking, it was my thing to do. But I always had to have a swim on my afternoon break. I'd throw the roast in and go down to the lake. I was usually the only swimmer in sight."

Mollie and Jim were helping with the resort in the late 1940's when they decided to take a post with the American Friends Service Committee

**FINDING SUMMER** Previous spread, from left: Fieldstone, cedar shake and towering trees set the expectation for a refined Up North summer dinner to come. The warmth of the entryway. Elevated versions of classic Northern dishes from the buffet. White tablecloths and mismatched chairs create a relaxed formality just right for summer diners.

**BELOW:** A bountiful buffet stands ready for Friday evening's first seating.

**OPPOSITE:** Every cabin has a name at Chimney Corners Resort.



See Chimney Corners on MyNorth.com. Search "Chimney Corners Video".



Silverwood

THE LODGE

Froshblick

TREETOPS

Jonquil

High

A KITCHEN KEEPER

### CHIMNEY CORNERS COOKBOOK

Mollie Rogers's humor, grace and immediacy make her a dear kitchen confidante, and her very personal collection of recipes is the kind you can snuggle in with and read like a novel. Gwen Frostic prints illuminate this 5th edition of *Chimney Corners Cookbook: Recipes and Reflections from Northwest Michigan*, and new favorites pair well with recipes Mollie has cherished for decades and really can't live without.

CONTACT CHIMNEY CORNERS RESORT FOR A COPY; \$21 INCLUDES SHIPPING AND HANDLING. 231-352-7522, CHIMNEYCORNERSRESORT.COM.







## MOLLIE'S GAZPACHO

What ripe Michigan tomatoes that don't get sliced and marinated (pictured above) become Mollie's favorite gazpacho.

- 4 ripe tomatoes, quartered
- ½ large green pepper, seeded, sliced
- 1 small onion, chunked
- 1 cucumber, peeled, sliced
- 1 clove garlic, smashed and peeled
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 3 tablespoons wine vinegar
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- ¼ teaspoon pepper
- ½ cup ice water

Pulse ingredients in a blender or food processor—don't reduce everything to mush. Serves 4. (I generally double or triple the recipe. Can't have too much gazpacho).



## CURRY DRESSING CHIMNEY CORNERS

Great on head lettuce or bowls of mixed greens. A tablespoon or so whipped into the mayonnaise for your potato salad is a good thought.

- 1 10½ ounce can tomato soup
- 1 medium onion, chunked
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
- 1 teaspoon pepper
- 2 teaspoons curry powder
- 1 tablespoon salt
- 1 teaspoon paprika
- Corn oil
- Cider vinegar

Measure tomato soup, onion, sugar, Worcestershire sauce, pepper, curry powder, salt and paprika into a blender or food processor bowl. Add corn oil to bring the measure to the 3-cup level. Add cider vinegar to the 4-cup level. Whiz until fluffy and pink.

in St. Nazaire, France, to help people in the war-shattered community get back on their feet.

“When we returned after a year and a half in France, Mother and Father Rogers were determined to retire,” says Mollie. In 1949, Mollie and Jim became second-generation innkeepers.

Mollie has spent every summer since—60 summers, in fact—right on Crystal Lake. But, she’ll confide, that one summer away in France flavored all the summer suppers to come.

**M**ollie upheld her mother-in-law’s motto—if you take their money, you owe them a good time—and carried on her tradition of making loving, lavish dinners for Chimney Corners guests.

“I discovered I did have a talent for it, thankfully,” she says. “People would say I learned to cook in France, but really, I learned to eat in France. It took me a while to figure out what they were doing that I wasn’t.” For example, Mollie discovered vegetable juice or stock in cream sauces made a *velouté* and began making authentic

**LEGACY OF DELICIOUS** Opposite: Marinated tomatoes and a classic curry dressing are mainstays on the buffet. This page: The resort’s namesake chimney. Mollie Rogers awaits the supper crowd.

*gratin de chou-fleur*, or what, she jokes, “in Michigan we called ‘aw grotten.’”

As Chimney Corners Resort guests grew to include families, “I probably shocked people in the beginning by using garlic and wine in their food,” says Mollie. “Once after one of my experiments with liqueur-ish dishes, a friendly guest asked if he could have ‘another shot of dessert.’ I subscribed to *Gourmet* and *Bon Appétit* and tried those recipes out on people. And people loved it. We served guests their first Caesar salad and their first Greek salad.”

And all of this she did with fresh local foods. “I loved going out to the farm and getting cream from the cream lady. I would get Swedish rye bread from a friend. There was a man who would call and ask if I wanted raspberries.” And of course she did. “I would make Midsummer Berry Dessert—really lovely—buttery but kind of light.”

Now Mollie’s children, third-generation proprietors Jim Jr. and wife Mary, with help from Jim’s sister Claudia in the kitchen and a team of gracious staff members, welcome families for the resort’s 75th summer. Mollie Rogers finds great joy seeing the resort “energetically nudged into a new century.” And the family recipes, now showcased at Friday night dinners all summer long, stay deliciously the same.

“We can’t dare take the whitefish—painted with sour cream and sprinkled with chives, lemon pepper and paprika—off the buffet,” says Mollie. “People definitely like to have their basil and tomatoes in French dressing. Chimney Corners cooks must have sliced and marinated enough tomatoes to make a red belt around the world.”

There is comfort and anticipation in people’s voices as they circle through the buffet in the lodge foyer, about to taste flavors that echo so many happy dinners before. “Oh, they have my favorite,” a gentleman says, digging into the Roquefort mold encasing a bounty of firm green olives. Or, “You have to try the curry dressing.” Then, “Save room for the coffee angel cake.” That’s a Chimney Corners classic, coffee-flavored angel food shrouded in delicate buttercream frosting and finished with toasted almonds.

Mollie observes how slow food and fresh local eating is now en vogue. “Down-home is back, but I guess for some of us it never left. We have seen enough food fads come and go to convince us that if we live long enough the old dishes will return, like pointy-toed shoes.” Or the luscious cranberry mold we’re about to spoon into. ■

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#### RESERVATIONS

### GET A SEAT AT THE TABLE

Chimney Corners traditional Friday night buffet served in a century-old lodge stars three classic entrees, exquisite salads, fresh-baked French bread, local vegetables treated with love, plus homespun desserts galore.

Seatings from 6 to 6:30 p.m. are open to the public, by reservation only, through Labor Day. Adults \$30 plus tax and tip, children \$8-\$15. Call by noon Thursday.

231-352-7522, CHIMNEYCORNERSRESORT.COM.