

Sustainable Sandhills' "Secret Supper" Revealed!



"Sssshhhh....!!! Can you keep a secret?" So read the invitation for **Sustainable Sandhills' Secret Supper** on April 14 at the home of Heidi and Paul Dent in Southern Pines.

A **Secret Supper** typically involves a popular local chef, fresh local food, and a location that is kept under wraps until the final days before the event. It's a trend that appeals to foodies and chefs alike, promising a casual good time outside of the formality of typical restaurant service. For Sustainable Sandhills, the event was a chance to introduce many Moore County natives to the organization and our programs. Nearly 70 guests sat at a single, long table and dined by candlelight, embraced by the surrounding Dent's amazing property and the Weymouth Woods Nature Preserve.

Local restaurateur **Ashley VanCamp** – a recognized leader in the local food movement in Moore County and owner of [Ashten's Restaurant](#) in Southern Pines, hosted this fundraiser for Sustainable Sandhills. House-made sausages, North Carolina wild caught shrimp, new potatoes and local asparagus fresh from the field were passed among guests, each of whom brought their own plates, silverware and wine glasses. To finish, guests enjoyed local strawberries spilling from creamy shortcake biscuits. Are you hungry yet???

Sustainable Sandhills' mission and programs support local food systems, plan for green growth, and encourage active living, so it was only fitting that we would host the area's first Secret Supper. Throughout the South and beyond, food-minded folks are gathering at long tables under the stars to meet others, eat well, and take in the beauty of the rural countryside. The night and property were special, and the delicious food and wonderful company provided a perfect setting to make the case to our guests for support of Sustainable Sandhills.



Secret Supper Club History

The South has a tradition of secret supper clubs, of gathering around food for food's sake. At clandestine gatherings of the "[Hot and Hot Fish Club](#)" in the early 1800's, 30-40 landowners (and at least one South Carolina governor) would meet on fishing ground hummocks around Pawleys Island and Murrells Inlet. The story goes that the men would fish all morning and then cook the catch for a dinner of two courses, the second always better than the first—making it *hot and hot*. The club was "dedicated to epicurean pursuits," and besides fish, everyone was required to bring champagne and brandy to share.

The granddaddy of today's supper clubs is held at John Henry Whitmire's house on the Waccamaw River, a few miles inland of Pawleys Island. Organized by *Outstanding in the Field's* Jim Denevan—who since 1999 has hosted dinners all over the country—the event was sold-out four months before the exact location was announced. And once there, more than 150 guests pass platters of local-caught wahoo along a looping line of tables at the edge of the old tidal rice impoundments.

In the supper club hotbed of Austin, TX, 32-year-old Hannah Calvert founded the [Supper Underground](#) in 2006. She explained that she's a corporate consultant who's "obsessed with food" and put on the first two dinners herself—serving more than 20 guests—before she invited her friend Tasso Ziebarth (who has worked in the Austin restaurant scene for years.) Since then, more than 700 people have signed up to receive Supper Underground's e-mail notices about the dinner parties, which are held on porches, in backyards, and in dining rooms around Austin. The monthly four-course meals are announced online on the Monday before a Saturday night event. People have 24 hours to accept, and from the responses, Calvert and Ziebarth create a thirty-person guest list.... The response has been so strong that Calvert says "it can be tough for people to get in."*

So stay alert for the next "Sssshh...!" popping in to your email inbox. A delicious adventure awaits you, shared with friends and fellow supporters of **Sustainable Sandhills!**

**excerpt from Dixie Dinning,
www.dixiedinning.com*

