



# Dinner in the Creek

Written by Melissa Corbin / Photography by Peter Guttman

## LIFE IS BUT A DREAM WITH BAMFOODS AND CATERING

Just outside of Franklin, Tennessee, there sits the early-1900s one-room Parham School just down Leipers Creek Road, and a stone's throw away from the village of Leipers Fork, Tennessee. The creek that babbles serenely behind the school is the setting for what is arguably Tennessee's most unique outdoor dining experience. People come from across the country to experience "Dinner in the Creek" by BAMFoods and are greeted with a welcome cocktail. After a short stroll to the creek's small waterfall, vintage furniture awaits guests to sit a spell for social hour in the creek. A four-course feast will soon commence, served on one long, impeccably decorated table that reaches beyond the waterfall, serenaded by a lone violin, or perhaps a string quartet. The menu and other details are difficult to predict because each and every "Dinner in the Creek" is as unique as the vibrant autumn leaves bidding adieu to another enchanting season of creek dinner parties. If you were to say this sounds like a dream, you'd be correct. Only this dream became a reality for one Tennessee couple.

While some distracted themselves from the realities that COVID-19 presented by baking bread or learning the latest social media dance trend, others dreamed, and dreamed big. Braiden and Annie Mallon were doing just that.

Braiden had spent nearly 20 years in the hospitality industry and supported his family by working what seemed like round-the-clock at Nashville's iconic The Pancake Pantry and 1799 Kitchen and Bar within The Harpeth Hotel of downtown Franklin, Tennessee. But when the world suddenly stopped, the Mallon family was forced to pivot. "We were broke," Annie recalls her family's pandemic-induced pickle. So, they started with a simple post on social media about preordering family meals (serving 4-6) of lasagna, pot pies, and the like for \$65 with free delivery throughout Williamson County. She remembers they made what their family liked to eat for dinner, because in fact they ate whatever was being prepared that particular day.

Annie says that between cottage industry laws, retail caps on purchasing groceries, and the limited kitchen space of their 1,600 square feet home, 15 meals per day was their max during the early days of the pandemic. "We only had about 100 Instagram followers in the beginning but ended up working six days a week out of our house in Leiper's Fork." That following has grown exponentially, for the record.

"The COVID-19 pandemic forced the industry to innovate and adapt, fundamentally transforming its business model. While many catering companies suffered severe financial losses, those that survived often emerged with a stronger focus on off-premise dining, technology, and advanced food safety," a recent

Catersource report illustrates how the Mallons found their off-premise dining sweet spot with BAMFoods and its most unique of all dining experiences.

While BAMFoods is now a full-service caterer in Middle Tennessee, what the company is most widely known for is its "Dinner in the Creek" series. Inspired by a local realtor friend's creek party, the Mallons took special note of the lawn chairs and tables in the creek that their host had "fancied up", according to Annie. The Mallons ultimately took the leap.

The first "Dinner in the Creek" that they catered was in collaboration with the Harpeth Conservancy in 2021 as a fundraiser for the local non-profit, where guests dined at a communal table set in Leiper's Creek, hosted by Rachael McCampbell and Curtis Stewart. "We were just hooked on it, and knew this is what we dreamed of doing," Annie says that by the next year, they were ready to launch their own "Dinner in the Creek" series with their realtor friend's and the conservancy's blessings, of course.

With the pandemic's hangover still lingering, it took a bit of coaxing. But, eventually, the BAMfoods plan for "Dinner in the Creek" flowed as beautifully as the creek itself. To date, there have been approximately 40 ticketed public dinners since its inception, with countless privately hosted ones in various locations.

These days, BAMFood's waitlist for a seat in the creek stretches about 200 registrants on the regular. Although on the private party side of things, Annie says they aren't limited to the Leiper's Fork creek location. Because they are completely outfitted with an outdoor kitchen, furniture, china, decor, and such, BAM can take their show on the road wherever a creek runs through it. The Mallons are also open to spaces on land, such as a barn or field. Still, the Mallons take pride in never duplicating a menu or decor for that BAM signature of excellence.

The Mallons announced their latest project on social media last fall as, "A leap of faith became the foundation of our dream." That leap they were talking about led them to purchase a vintage parcel in the small town of Hampshire, Tennessee, that they've branded as Valley Kitchen by BAMFoods Catering. Annie likes to call Hampshire "the Napa Valley of Tennessee," where Natchez Hills Vineyard, Amber Falls Winery and Cellars, and Keg Springs Wineries create the perfect trifecta for this chef-driven destination. It's too soon to tell how far the Mallon's magic will take this sleepy little town. But merrily they will go, drifting down the dream of a stream.





AFTER A SHORT STROLL TO THE CREEK'S SMALL WATERFALL, VINTAGE FURNITURE AWAITS GUESTS TO SIT A SPELL FOR SOCIAL HOUR IN THE CREEK.



## BAM JAM

*A favorite of Chef Braiden, his BAM Jam is featured on most of the menus. From biscuits and tarts to beef tenderloin, it's the magic in so many of his dishes.*

### INGREDIENTS

- ¼ cup extra virgin olive oil
- 4 pints grape tomato
- 2 tbslp kosher salt
- 4 bay leaves
- 2 tbslp chile flakes
- 2 tbslp black pepper
- 1 large yellow onion, diced
- 10 cloves of garlic, chopped
- 1 cup brown sugar
- 1 cup apple cider vinegar

### INSTRUCTIONS

1. Heat extra virgin olive oil on high heat in a medium soup pot, until oil is shimmering.
2. Add tomatoes until they begin to blister.
3. Add salt, bay leaves, chili flakes, black pepper, and onions.
4. Allow onions to begin caramelizing and then stir in garlic.
5. Add brown sugar and stir to melt, quickly add vinegar.
6. Bring to a hard boil and remove from heat.
7. Using an immersion blender, rough mix and return to medium heat. Simmer for 10-15 minutes.
8. Remove from the stove and allow to cool.

