

Coming next week

Butter, Just Better

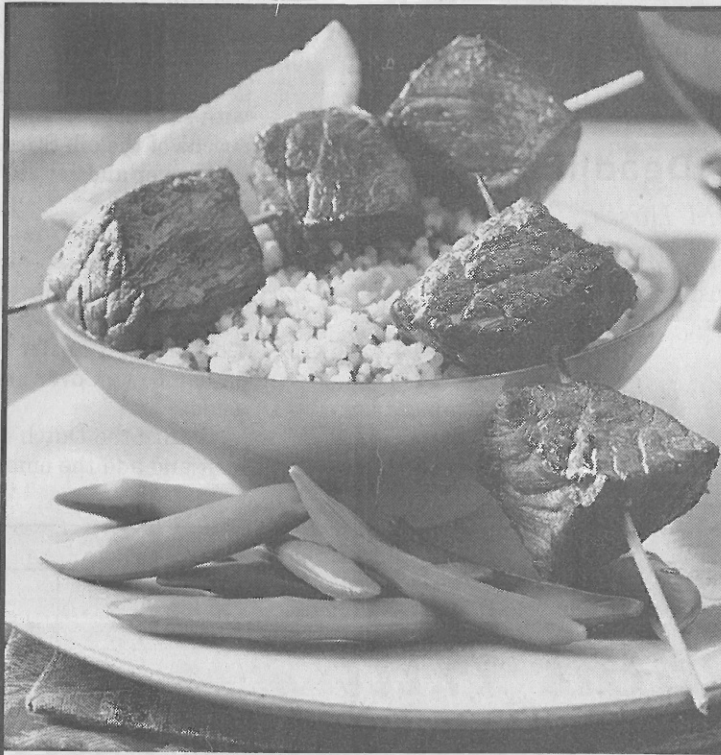
The artisan food movement spreads to spreads.

flavor

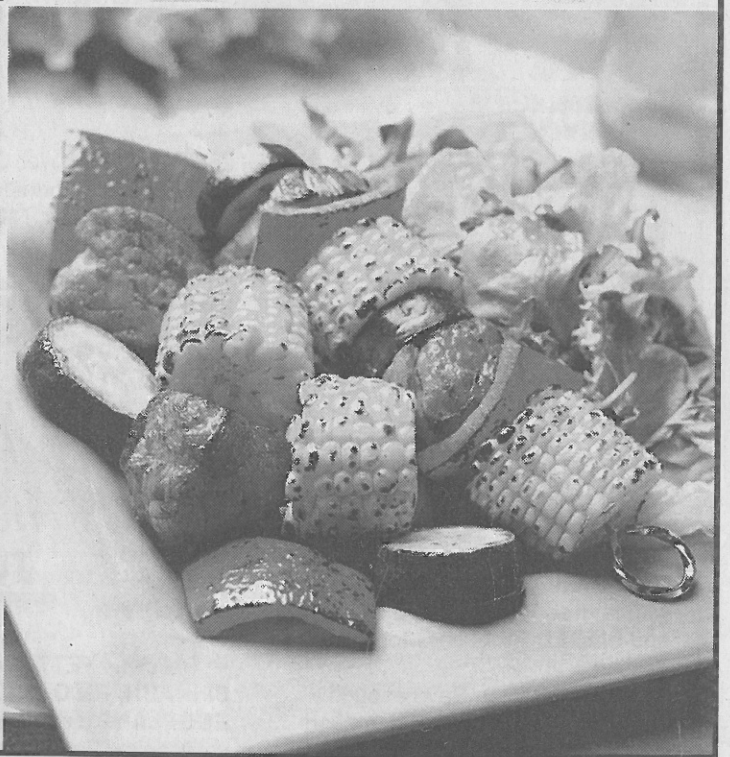
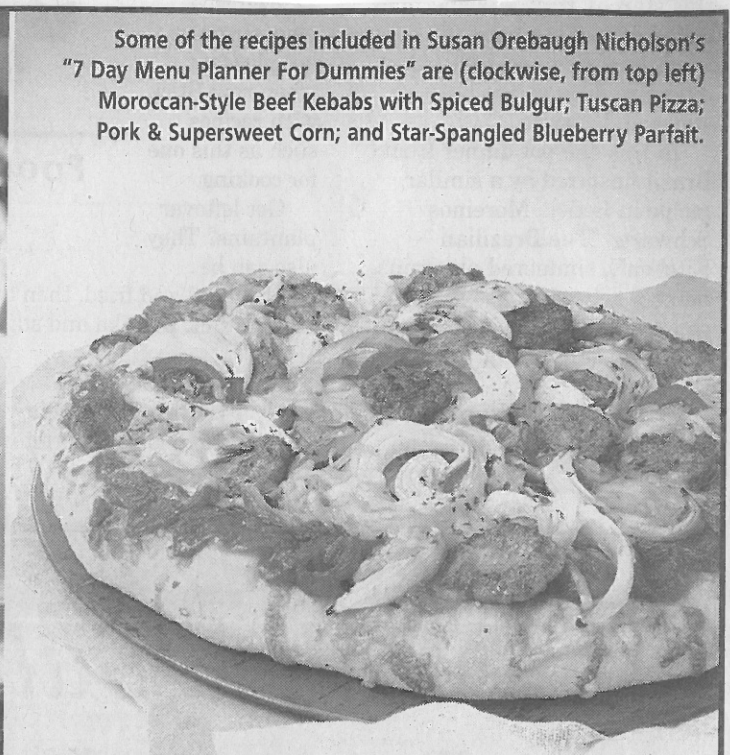
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Some of the recipes included in Susan Orebaugh Nicholson's "7 Day Menu Planner For Dummies" are (clockwise, from top left) Moroccan-Style Beef Kebabs with Spiced Bulgur; Tuscan Pizza; Pork & Supersweet Corn; and Star-Spangled Blueberry Parfait.



Relax! (It's Just A Meal)

Author, Columnist, Area Native To Sign Latest Cookbook

Story by Camden Layell ■ Courtesy Photos

New Market native Susan Nicholson didn't set out to become an authority on menu planning. But after 17 years as an author, that's exactly what she's become.

Her column, "7-Day Menu Planner," is followed by more than 6 million readers in publications across the U.S.

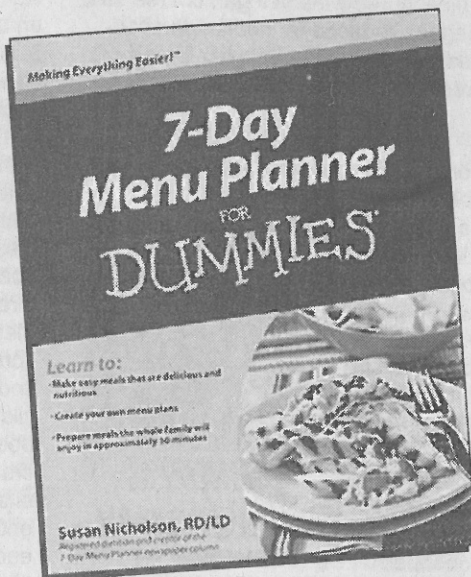
And it's not hard to see the appeal.

"It's quick, easy, healthy meals with a budget in mind," she says.

On Saturday, locals will have an opportunity to meet the author when she signs "7-Day Menu Planner for Dummies," a compilation of her recipes.

Planting The Seed

After graduating from Broadway High, Nicholson attended the University of Mary Washington, where she majored in dietetics. Little did



she know that her first job out of college would plant a seed.

"Working as a hospital dietician is where I really learned to plan menus," Nicholson said. "Now I do it in a setting for families cooking at home." But she wanted to do more.

Like so many before her, she

Want To Go?

A book signing with Susan Nicholson, author of "7-Day Menu Planner For Dummies," will be held Saturday, from 1:30 to 3 p.m., at Barnes and Noble, 1925 E. Market St.

thought Paris would be the place.

She earned a certificate at the La Varenne, Ecole de Cuisine (or La Varenne Cooking School), where she added "some credentials for cooking."

When she returned to the States, Nicholson settled in Atlanta, Ga., where the opportunity arose to buy a microwave specialty store.

"It was a franchise and it seemed like a good opportunity for my cooking skills and also to own my own business," she said.

The store featured a microwave

Column Catches Food Editor's Eye

Menu

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cooking school in the back. Only one problem: She didn't know how to cook in a microwave.

"I didn't own a microwave until I bought the store, and then I owned 500," she said.

Hitting The Big Time

A quick learner, she got the hang of it in no time and her quick meal ideas soon grabbed the attention of the media. She was invited to appear on cooking segments for CNN, TNN, the Discovery Channel and Atlanta network television, making more than 125 appearances.

After one such TV spot, she was approached to write her first cookbook, "Save Your Heart with Susan: Six Easy Steps to Cooking Delicious Healthy Meals in a Microwave," published in 1991.

Nicholson and her book caught the eye of the food editor at the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, which was publishing a regular column entitled, "The 7-Day Menu Planner." The editor was looking to revamp the column to focus on healthier, simple-to-make recipes that were user-friendly.

Nicholson was asked to take over the column.

"I was the perfect person to do it," she said. "The editor knew I was a very pragmatic and practical person and very frugal. With the background in food and nutrition, I could put all these skills together."

The premise for the column is simple: a recipe guide for every dinner of the week.

"The recipes are easy, very approachable, and very simple. Anyone can prepare [them]," said Nicholson.

A Dining Dynamo

Her tips have cultivated quite a loyal following.

Nancy Stohs, food editor of the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, which has been a syndicate of the column

for 10 years, remembers, "Once, I left the column out. I got an email from a loyal fan, who was very upset with me, and said, 'How am I going to know what to cook for dinner this week?'"

One of the syndicates felt the column could go even further.

"The idea was pitched by a syndicate to the 'Dummy' franchise," said Nicholson.

The idea was well-received and, when she was formally approached to write the book, she didn't hesitate.

"[The book] is much more than the column," says Nicholson. "It has a year's worth of recipes and menus, but it also has another hundred or so pages of how to's, planning budgets, shopping, nutrition information and how to plan your own menus."

So where does Nicholson get her inspiration for these recipes? "Everywhere," she says. "Friends, family, books, magazines, out of my own head. I make them up, create them."

Triumphant Return

Members of the community are pumped for Nicholson's return to the Shenandoah Valley. The Rev. Jeffrey Sonafelt, of Reformation Lutheran Church, where Nicholson attended services growing up, says, "Lots of folks in the community really appreciate and enjoy the column."

"A number of folks in the congregation have read the book and just think it's wonderful, all the recipes and insights into cooking and planning that she gives."

Though Nicholson has made a successful career out of helping others plan healthy and easy menus, she says it's OK to slip every now and then.

"My favorite food, [and] my undoing, is french fries," she says. "And I eat far too many."

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