

Sophisticated Courtright's offers a pleasant surprise

By **DANIEL DUGGAN**
Staff Writer

The rustic surroundings of Willow Springs are part of the charm at the sophisticated Courtright's.

Even though it's nestled into a hill, surrounded by a lush forest preserve, Courtright's has the kind of inventive cuisine that you'd expect to find at a place in the South Loop.

As it marks its 11th anniversary on Wednesday, Courtright's can look back on a well-deserved reputation as one of THE fine-dining restaurants in the south suburbs.

The atmosphere and the service were remarkable, but the most delightful part of our recent visit was the creativity from chef Jonathan Harootunian.

Everything we ordered was perfect — but the experience went beyond that. Things we ordered were surprising.

The chef sent a special appetizer to every table. It wasn't on the menu. It was some sort of crab cake with a little potato mixed in, then served on a bed of apples. Crab and apples. Yeah, weird. But it works, and it was amazing.

We uncovered another surprise in the arugula salad. A little red disc about the size of a quarter. Sweet, salty. What is this thing? We eventually solved the riddle. A fig, wrapped in prosciutto. Again, it sounds weird but tastes phenomenal.

Co-owner William Courtright says the lamb is among the restaurant's most popular items.

Given his background, he knows a thing or two about a great cut of meat. His father bought Ken's Restaurant at 105th Street and Western Avenue in 1956. Ken's, now owned by William's cousin, Jack Casto, is known for its ribs.

Courtright's brother, Carl, owns Jenny's Steakhouse in Chicago Ridge and Murphy's in Mokena.

William Courtright said he and his wife, Rebecca, "created (Courtright's) as a destination to cater to those who really enjoy fine dining."

The lamb deserves its reputation. Tender near the bone, crispy enough on the outside to



Brett Roseman/Daily Southtown

Co-owners William and Rebecca Courtright stand in the extensive wine cellar at Courtright's restaurant, 8989 S. Archer Ave., Willow Springs.

Courtright's

Address: 8989 S. Archer Ave., Willow Springs

Phone: (708) 839-8000

Hours: 5 to 9 p.m.

Tuesdays to Thursdays,

5 to 10 p.m. Fridays and

Saturdays, 4 to 8 p.m.

Sundays. Closed

Mondays

Credit Cards: All major cards accepted

Reservations:

Suggested for Fridays and Saturdays

give the flavor of a grill, it was served with roasted red potatoes and a roasted garlic sauce.

Great.

The lamb prompted a conversation at our table about etiquette vs. pure, unadulterated gluttony.

"I'm using a lot of self-control to not eat this meat off the bone," one person at our table said to the server.

A Southern gentleman, he left it alone — despite her prodding:

It was much easier to eat every last bit of the apple wood bacon-wrapped scallops, which we also tried. The bacon was rich and full of great smoky flavors and went great with the fresh scallops.

Courtright's is known for its

seafood dishes, and it's easy to see why. We tried two appetizers, the tuna tartare and the grilled sugarcane-skewered prawns.

Being a sushi fan, it's easy for me to like the idea of eating raw tuna — and I'm glad I can. The tuna was crisp and fresh, seasoned slightly to enhance the flavor but not to overpower the taste of fresh fish. Topped with wasabi-flavored tobiko (very small fish eggs), it was better than what I've had at great sushi places.

We finished the meal with a strawberry soufflé that was sweet and flaky.

And as impressive as the food was the service.

Our server managed to stay out of sight until needed. She even went so far as to appear at our table, then step away until we finished our conversation.

Courtright's has an arsenal of wine in its basement, making it a tough choice for the right food-wine pairing. Our server kept it simple. "The lamb? Try one of these two wines," she said, pointing to the wine list.

Her choice, a Tapestry Shiraz, was perfect.

Courtright's wasn't cheap. For two of us, the tab went over our \$100 budget by about \$30.

But food and interesting flavors often are inextricably tied to our memories. Fun conversation and reminiscing can be a much more memorable event when it's tied to food that you won't forget either.