

## There's a lot right and to like about Courtright's restaurant

By Don Snider

Only four restaurants in the Chicago area have been rated four stars by one respected Chicago dining critic.

And only one is in the South Suburbs — Courtright's in Willow Springs.

That obviously speaks volumes for Courtright's food and service.

Courtright's, besides extraordinary food by chef Jonathan Harootunian, has a multitude of things worth reporting.

Thanks to William and Rebecca Courtright, who have owned the restaurant since 1993, Courtright's is unique among Chicago area's highly rated fine-dining establishments.

■ It's larger than most, with a seating capacity of 150.

■ It's not as expensive.

Entrees are all in the \$30 to \$36 range, and the best values are Courtright's fixed price meals. Three-course meals are \$53 and four-course meals are \$60.

Three-course meals include a choice of appetizer, a choice of soup or salad and a choice of entree and dessert. Four-course meals add the choice of appetizer as standard.

"For a fine dining restaurant, we're more affordable," Rebecca Courtright says, "so we have a lot of repeat customers; they don't come just once a year, or for just special occasions.

"And we're not pretentious or a bottom-line restaurant."

Courtright's signature entrees are its rack of lamb and its filet mignon.

But, Rebecca says, Harootunian "loves seafood, and has traveled to Japan and New York and other places where he's been influenced."

"So any of his seafood dishes are also our specialties."

■ Courtright's wine list, if not unique, is certainly among the more extensive.

"Not being in the city, we can have a deep cellar," Rebecca says.

"We have 1,100 wine selections, and we try to have some of the latest and most unusual offerings."

For example, she points out, Santiago Archaval is bringing in some of his finest wines from Argentina to showcase at Courtright's on Oct. 21.

■ There's that stunning setting



Rebecca and William Courtright enjoy a glass of wine in front of the gazebo at their restaurant in Willow Springs.

on two wooded acres that soon will take on the colors of autumn to backdrop its beautiful gazebo.

"We've had more than 100 couples married in the gazebo," Rebecca says.

"We also host a lot of (post-) funeral receptions. We try to help people turn them into celebrations of life, rather than death.

"We feel we touch a lot of people's lives."

■ In fact, touching people's lives is one of the Courtright's greatest satisfactions.

That's why, Rebecca says, they are involved in so many charitable activities.

"I was a full-time mother of four children (Don, now 28; Elizabeth, 26; David, 25, and Benjamin, 14)," she says, "so I've been involved in community things for a long time."

William Courtright grew up in a restaurant family.

His parents, now deceased, owned Ken's restaurant at 105th Street and Western Avenue in Chicago's Beverly neighborhood. William's cousin, Jack Casto, and Casto's wife, Cathie, now run it.

Rebecca was raised in Davenport, Iowa, and met William at St. Ambrose College. They have been married 29 years.

The Courtrights have funded a chapter of the Phoenix Society, for people who struggle with emotional problems, since the early 1980s.

The Courtrights also are involved in the Meals on Wheels program that provides elderly and disabled residents with meals and critical services.

■ Many of the Courtright's interests are reflected in their restaurant's monthly calendar of events.

For example, coming up are: Oct. 17 — Complimentary wine and cheese tasting.

Artisan wine and cheese makers will be at the restaurant from 5 to 9 p.m. The complimentary event is limited to 200 people.

Oct. 21 — Argentine wine-maker Santiago Archaval will bring some of his finest selections for a four-course wine dinner. Reservations are being accepted.

Oct. 22 — Harootunian will join 45 other celebrity chefs at a dinner gala at Chicago's Marshall Field's on State Street for a Meals on Wheels benefit.

Tickets are at (312) 673-4411 and more information is at [www.mealsonwheelschicago.org](http://www.mealsonwheelschicago.org).

Oct. 23 — Harootunian joins other Chicago-area chefs to celebrate the city's wine and culinary community at Kendall College, 900 N. Branch St., Chicago.

There will be exclusive cooking demonstrations. Tickets are \$80 at [www.cwff.net](http://www.cwff.net).

"We're thrilled to be rated one of the top four restaurants in the Chicago area," Rebecca says.

"Our ambition is to be among the best in the country."

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*Courtright's is at 8989 Archer Ave., Willow Springs. It is open daily except Mondays for dinner only (some private lunches by reservation). Phone: (708) 839-8000.*

**Firstlook Dining Out columnist Carol Roberts is on vacation.**