

The Sutton Avian Research Center and Grogg's Green Barn shared a similar goal of advancing conservation, but they were on different paths. The Sutton Center, one of the nation's most renowned bird research and repopulation centers, was spreading the word through programs and seminars. Grogg's Green Barn was hoping to educate people about the need for sustainable agriculture in their yards and habitat for wildlife through a new farm-to-market restaurant.

"It made perfect sense to me to combine our efforts," said Matt Owen, executive chef for The Reserve at Grogg's Green Barn. "This will expose both of us to a larger audience. It's a way to better educate people to where this stuff comes from. I tell people all the time that if you eat, you're involved in agriculture. Everyone should know where your food comes from, and that involves not just the plants but also the birds and butterflies and insects that make the food possible. Food is more than plants and water. It's the entire environment."

The result of this collaboration is the Sutton Center farm-to-table lecture series, billed as the "Birds and Books at the Barn," a unique combination of dinner/education, spreading the gospel of edible gardens and habitat for wildlife. "Honestly, in many cases, we were talking about the same group of people," said Audra Fogle, of the Sutton Center. "The people coming to the farm-to-table meals are many of the same people who've come to some of our programs about conservation of our environment. Combining the two seemed like a natural. So, we approached Grogg's Green Barn about trying to combine our shared goal of educating the public to the importance of these issues in our environment." A series of three farm-to-table meals and lectures begins with "Save the Eagles" by researcher David Hancock on Oct. 17 at The Reserve. The other two lecture programs are "Winter Birds and Oklahoma's Pioneering Winter Bird Atlas" with Sutton researcher Dan Reinking on Nov. 14, and "Sage Grouse: Icon of the West" on Dec. 5 with Noppadol Paotjong, a noted photographer and author from the Missouri Department of Conservation. All three events will be held at The Reserve at Grogg's Green

Barn, 10105 E. 61st St., and cost \$65 per person. The menu will change to fit the season. "Everything is from our garden less than 100 yards from our kitchen or locally sourced from farmers and dairies," Owen said. "It'll change. Our menu changes every week. What's available in our garden changes every day. So the menu is always changing. And, we want to educate people to the importance of the food they eat and where it comes from." Carla Grogg, owner of Grogg's Green Barn, said The Reserve was added in the spring to help promote backyard edible gardens, a specialty for Grogg's Green Barn. Currently, The Reserve is open Friday and Saturday for farm-to-table dinners. Normally, diners get a short tour and explanation of the meal in the adjoining 2-acre garden. Bringing in internationally-known lecturers on conservation and environmental issues was a natural extension of what Grogg's was doing in its new restaurant. "It was an idea from the Sutton, and it was a perfect idea for us," Grogg said. "It was a way to better connect with our customers. It was a way to connect people at these dinners with the food, something we hoped to accomplish. And, it has opened up a whole new client base for us." Much like the Sutton Center, which has conducted cutting-edge technology in avian research and repopulation of endangered species, Grogg's Green Barn has been advocating the repopulation of native Oklahoma plants to the environment. "You would be amazed how many things can be edible plants in your garden locally," Grogg said. "By adding the Sutton Center lectures, we're helping people understand the importance of proper plant habitat for the conservation and health of everything from birds to insects. It's all about the preservation of our environment. It all works together. This lecture series is a way to combine two major issues, the conservation and preservation of native plants with birds and butterflies and insects. So the series combines the educational elements of your backyard garden for edible plants and bird/insect habitat." While the speakers educate through lectures, Owen will be bringing it all together in the farm-to-table meals. "You'd be surprised how

many edible plants are available over the course of a year," said Owen. "It's

always changing in our edible garden, but there are always plants available throughout the

year. "If you combine that with providing habitat, you are making a real contribution

to the environment. I think this lecture series will help make that point while

we're having a lot of fun, too." John Klein 918-581-8368 john.klein@tulsaworld.com Twitter: @JohnKleinTW