

'Fresh food, simply prepared'

Hilton teamwork turns out culinary delights

By Marie McGee
staff writer

Tim Cleary was one of those lucky kids who always knew what he wanted to be when he grew up. As far as back as first grade, he was sure he wanted to be a chef — only his spelling wasn't so hot in those days and he spelled it "chief." Now — some 33 years later — it turns out he's both.

Cleary, who lives in Livonia with his wife Nancy, is the culinary wizard at the Plymouth Hilton who recently won a bronze medal at the prestigious National Restaurant Association annual show in Chicago. The panel of judges was selected from the World Congress of Chefs who judge the World Culinary Olympics held every four years in Frankfurt, Germany.

AS HEAD OF the Hilton's food ser-

vice, Cleary says he's more "chief" than "chef" because of the administrative duties that are involved in the supervision of a staff of 45 persons, and the operation of a restaurant, coffee shop, as well as working closely with the catering service, plus servicing an employee dining room and overseeing the purchasing and receiving department.

"Actually, cooking is only 10 percent

of my job," said Cleary. But what he does do is to check to see that everyone else is doing their job to his standards. He makes the rounds every day, taste-testing everything.

"The coffee must be good . . . the bacon crisp . . . the vegetables fresh . . . the pastry flaky . . . the sauce delicately seasoned," he says, twirling the long curved ends of a handlebar mustache that adds a dash of old-world

flavor to an otherwise youngish chef.

CLEARY PROBABLY has an edge over others in the culinary arts field. Not only he is good at what he does, but he is also very articulate and has strong organizational skills.

Teamwork is important in any operation, he stresses, but more important in the food business. In the four years he has been at the Plymouth Hilton, he has concentrated on developing a properly trained staff and works hard to create an environment that keeps them from moving on.

It will be that kind of a staff and the teamwork involved that will be important when Super Bowl XVI football classic comes to the Pontiac Superdome in January 1982.

THE PLYMOUTH Hilton — with one of the largest ballrooms in the area — will undoubtedly be headquarters for some of the festivities that are being planned.

"We're not sure what part we will play," Cleary said. "We've been told the final decision will be made two weeks before the Super Bowl."

Hilton officials believe they will be asked to host an hors d'oeuvres cocktail type of party for several thousand visitors rather than a sit-down banquet.

But either way, Cleary said they can handle it. This was proven last year when Detroit hosted the national GOP convention and the Hilton was headquarters for the Massachusetts delegation as well as camera crews and the editorial staff of Newsweek and Time magazines.

"A sit-down banquet may sound like a lot of work, but actually an hors d'oeuvres reception is harder because they take so much time to make," Cleary said. He figures his staff will have to start weeks in advance to make the thousands of finger foods that will be required for a group that large.

Cleary traces his love of cooking to his family life in upstate New York.

"My mother was Italian and my father was Irish. I had three brothers and one sister and the kitchen was the center of our home."

HIS FATHER, he said, was unlike most men of that era who believed that only women should do the cooking.

"He believed that cooking was a great art and he loved to cook," Cleary recalled.

Cleary started cooking at an early age. "With our size family, there was always someone around to sample it." His first job was as kitchen boy at the YMCA. After that he worked at a bakery with an old-style pastry chef, who taught him many tricks of the baking trade that have served him well in his culinary endeavors, he said.

THE DAY AFTER graduation he left for Ireland where he began a three-year apprenticeship at Dromoland Castle, Newmarket-on-Fergus, County Clare. He has been with the Hilton chain for nine years, four of them as executive chef at the Plymouth hotel.

Cleary's motto is "Fresh food, simply prepared."

But for the recent Chicago competition, he veered slightly to create a three-part masterpiece that included poached salmon in pink peppercorn sauce, garnished with fresh asparagus, cucumber mousse in a ring of summer squash. His pastry was a barquette — a football-shaped pie shell — filled puree of parsnips and glazed with butter with a carrot knob on top. Along with it he had cream of fresh mussels soup with saffron. Rather than using crackers, he lined a glass bowl with an unsweetened crepe Suzette that called for lemon zest and cognac rather than sugar and served the soup from that combination.

The third part of the competition featured roast rack of lamb glazed with glace de vinand, a pure gelatinous glaze, attained after four days of continuous boiling of natural beef stock. The lamb was garnished with poach-d pears with chopped fresh mint in creme de menthe.

CLEARY SAID he started last March to experiment with the hot dish. When the contest time arrived, it took him three days to set things up and transport the entry via Coleman coolers to Chicago where he then put on the finishing touches. He feels his entry suffered slightly from the three-day waiting period.

There's another competition coming up the fall, but he's not sure he will enter.

Competitions are good because they raise the level of culinary excellence in the U. S., he feels, but he gets more of kick out of cooking for "people you know — the ones you see all the time."



Kevin McLaughlin of Farmington Hills puts the finishing touch on a torte under the watchful eye of the executive chef, Tim Cleary of Livonia. In the back is Gary Landroche. McLaughlin's dad is the pastry chef at the Plymouth Hilton.



Chef Cleary and Mark Steffke prepare roast duck in the Hilton kitchen. Because its large dining facilities, the Hilton will probably host some of the Super Bowl festivities next January.



Chef Tim Cleary shows off the finished product while his night dinner crew looks on.

Staff photos by Bob Woodring



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