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Janet Lorente checks the wine as she prepares to serve the next course. The chef and his staff later received an enthusiastic round of applause from the appreciative diners.

Thursday, January 26, 1978

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Jack McCarthy (left) talks with Rosemarie Karbal, chairwoman, as they sample the many courses put before them.

Chosen few select menu for benefit

By GRETCHEN HITCH

Award-winning restaurateur Lester Gruber recently closed himself in the Siberia portion of his London Chop House with some of his most appreciative and knowledgeable customers to choose a menu for next month's Le Lundi Gras benefit for the Archives of American Art.

"I don't want pedestrian food," Gruber told his guests as they sat down to what would be a two-to-three-hour culinary tour de force.

The responsibility that the guests had for selecting what to eat was some. The menu they were about to select will be savored and discussed by 170 people who were foresighted enough to send \$200 per couple reservations for the Feb. 6 dinner as soon

as their invitations arrived. This is one benefit of the year that could double its popularity and still have a waiting list.

Gruber, a showman of considerable style, began the proceedings by telling the table at large, "I cater to five percent of my clientele and they help educate the rest." It was a superfluous statement since there wasn't a person at the table who wasn't already aware that his fabled table has served as the primer to at least two generations of Detroit society.

While the waiters, including the restaurant's most attractive female "waiter," Janet Lorente, served the dishes, Gruber explained that the Lundi Gras banquet this year will feature La Cuisine Nouvelle. Legendary in France but new to the United

States, the cuisine offers fewer calories, less butter and less starch for the lean, slim line.

The first task placed before the tasting committee was to eat five canape selections to follow. Though all are veterans at the job of selecting, committee members Rosemarie Karbal and Diane Schenck, archives national president Dr. Irving Burton, his wife Doris and Bob Moloney, the benefit decorator, tasted the food thoughtfully under Gruber's expert and knowledgeable tutelage.

Gruber called Caviar Provencale the "poorman's caviar." The Tapenade is composed of pureed Moroccan olives, anchovy fillets, capers, mustard and herbs, served in thin rounds of Bellagio croute, mushroom caps, cherry tomatoes or zucchini.

Both chairwomen, Rosemarie and Diane, felt the entree was bitter. It is an "acquired taste," said Gruber.

Moving on, they next tasted Terrine de Canard au Basilic, a pate of duck served with pumpernickel, and Tarte de Vallee D'Aosta, a cheese and spinach tart. The guests vetoed Crabmeat Nicuse, delicious though it was.

Next came the soup, Potage au Rognons et Concombres d'Aneth, which drew raves of "excellent" and "unforgettable" from the committee. A version of Russian soup which can also be served cold, the potage is composed of kidneys, cucumbers and pickle juice, plus other culinary secrets.

The fish course, Crevettes a la Saint-Tropez, is made of shrimp heavily lacquered with garlic and served on a bed of rice or shredded lettuce. With it Gruber announced he will serve a white Burgundy, Chassagne Montrachet "Chateau de la Maltroye" 1976.

When the entree arrived, Gruber said he selects each duck fresh from the Eastern Market. The crispy skinned fowl will be served, he said, with potatoes Dauphinois and tiny snow pea pods flavored with fennel. With it, Gruber promised Chateau Cantenac 1970, which he termed "a great wine he will sell."

For the cheese course the committee selected a Camembert which will be presented with a 1973 Beugne wine. Although he termed cheese and wine "a cliché," the committee voted to keep their selection.

"I cater to five percent of my clientele and they help educate the rest."

—Restaurateur Lester Gruber

The low-colored Nouvelle Cuisine is apparently meant to be disregarded when the moment for sweets arrives. The crowning, glorious dessert, Gateau au Chocolat et Kirsh, is essentially a chocolate mousse topped with Kirsh-soaked marzipan.

"It tastes like sin," said Doris Burton, savoring every luscious mouthful.

Schepack, the committee's food master, told the committee, "food must be exciting, adventurous and innovative."

He added that this was food they would find nowhere else in town. With the exception of the Crabmeat Nicuse, the committee voted to retain all of Gruber's suggestions with the proviso that the portions be cut in size.

Gruber concurred. "Too much food is obscene," he declared.

Sated and euphoric, the tasters still had time to relax and to listen while archives president Irving Burton toasted their host. "He never made it commercial," he made a gourmet adventure.

Then, Chop House chef de cuisine Jimmy Schenck was invited to bring his staff to the table for a fulsome round of applause.



Janet Lorente, a new addition to the London Chop House staff, carefully pours the wine for owner Lester Gruber.

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