

Chef uses imagination to spiff up banquet menu

By LISA GERBER

Supervising the preparation and serving of unconventional convention dining with a dash of elegance is Richard Cregar's specialty.

The 41-year-old West Bloomfield resident prides himself on seeing that ordinary business banquets, for more than 3,000 persons each week, become a memorable dining experience.

Cregar believes banquet fare can be more than wilted salads and overdone chopped beef.

However, attending meetings is the only way to taste Cregar's cuisine. He is the director of Le Gourmet, the dining facility at the Michigan State University Management Education Center in Troy. He also is director of CAV Food Services, Inc., the executive dining facility at the General Motors

Training Center in Warren.

In both of his operations, "The accent is on executive dining at competitive prices," Cregar said as he sipped coffee in Le Gourmet's quiet dining room decorated in muted earthtones and World War II paintings.

"We like to make people feel like they are dining instead of eating," Cregar said.

Cregar's ENTHUSIASM for the restaurant business goes beyond his local responsibilities. In January, he was elected to the board of directors of the Michigan Restaurant Association (MRA).

The MRA represents more than 1,600 restaurants in educational and legislative affairs.

"Life is like a bank," Cregar explained. "You can't keep making withdrawals, sometimes you have to make deposits."

One of the MRA's most recent contributions to the restaurant industry and the public was its "truth-in-menu" policy.

The association launched an educational campaign to encourage accuracy in menus.

"If a menu says 'Roast Vermont Turkey,' the turkey had better be from Vermont," Cregar said.

The "truth-in-menu" policy preceded passage of the Michigan Consumer Bill, which states that products cannot be mislabeled concerning weight, amount, or type of product, said Henry Montague, MRA president.

"Colorful, flowery phrasing and accuracy of the menu are not compatible," Montague said. "Words such as 'fresh' and 'homemade' are used a little too freely."

The Michigan association was the

first in the country to begin an accuracy-of-menu campaign, Cregar said.

THE CREGAR name has long been associated with dining in the Detroit area. Cregar's father founded Cregar's Pickwick House in northwest Detroit.

It was in the kitchen of the Pickwick House that Cregar began his food career at the age of 13 washing dishes.

A 1958 graduate from the Michigan State University School of Hotel, Restaurant and Institutional Management, Cregar is now a guest lecturer there.

When he speaks to MSU students, he does not paint a rosy picture of the restaurant business.

His advice to students is "The only place that 'success' comes before 'work' is in the dictionary."

Catastrophes are sometimes inevitable. There is nothing like watching a table collapse into the laps of eight or

10 businessmen, Cregar said.

And, the ultimate of nightmares is having a large group turn up for lunch of which there is no prior knowledge—someone forgot to book it.

Cregar's favorite saying is "The difficult we do immediately, the impossible takes five minutes."

When the going gets rough, Cregar takes off his suit coat, puts on an apron and sets to work in the kitchen.

In fact, he never tires of cooking. His home on Pine Lake has two kitchens. One is used as a test kitchen where he and his wife Cheryl experiment on new recipes and menu combinations in their spare time.

One evening, the two spent hours handpicking 120 strawberries for a luncheon only to find the delicacies sit-

ting in a sticky pool the next morning because the night had been warm and sticky.

"HE WORKS some long hours—often 15 or 16 a day, but that's his personality," Mrs. Cregar said.

Besides directing Le Gourmet and CAV Food Services and working with the MRA, Cregar serves on four other boards: Cregar's Pickwick House; his subdivision, Interlaken Improvement Association; Pine Lake Country Club; and MSU's College of Business.

Cregar also serves on the food advisory committee at Athens High School in Troy. He is southeast regional chairman for MSU's President's Club. And, he serves on MSU's Developmental Council.

"I only wish that there were more hours in the day to do all the things I want to do," Cregar said.

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