

Chez Raphael's chef does dinner for 6

By Ethel Simmons
staff writer

DINING AT Chez Raphael in Novi is elegant enough, but when the celebrated young chef of that prestigious restaurant comes to prepare a meal in your own home, well, that's really extra special.

Dr. James Lawson, a plastic surgeon, and his wife, Wendy, of Bloomfield Hills, a registered nurse who manages the office, attended a benefit auction last spring and were the lucky bidders on a dinner for six by chef Keith Famie.

Wendy said they originally planned to have the dinner served after their new swimming pool was installed this summer, but when the pool wasn't completed until fall, they decided to make the dinner a holiday event instead.

The day after the dinner, she said, "It was five-star, believe me."

Famie had asked her what she wanted to serve, and she replied she would leave it up to him. The only thing she specified was veal for the entrée.

"It was the best, most wonderful veal I've ever had," she said Monday, about the dinner Sunday.

FAMIE, in a phone conversation last week, described some of the dishes he had selected for the menu.

"I am doing one of my best veal dishes," he said, "a stuffed veal loin filled with foie gras, sweetbreads and wild mushrooms, and wrapped in spinach mousse. It will be really different."

The chef took one assistant, Tim Clark, and one waiter, Martin Kithen, to the Lawsons' home to help with the meal.

Asked how much she had bid at the auction, Wendy declined to name the price but said, "There were quite a few bidders. I fought for it."

Famie said, "It would be a very expensive meal," but that he was willing to do it because the money went to a good cause. He also took on the meal, which he called "The Lawson Family Christmas Extravaganza," because he is thinking of starting to do catering in private homes, for six-eight people.

"I find it to be very creative but, most of all, it's very personal," Famie said.

The chef prepared four hors d'oeuvres to precede dinner. These included lobster and cheese pizza, smoked salmon with Beluga caviar, duck and pheasant pale with Cumberland sauce, and duck foie gras with toast points.

Appetizer was rosettes of Norwegian salmon poached with sauce of red wine court bouillon with cucumbers, tomatoes and dill, garnished with fried oysters.

Salad combined radicchio, romaine, Belgian endive, spinach and bibb lettuce, tossed with light basil vinaigrette with parmesan cheese. Dessert was a Michigan apple bake — a hollowed apple filled with dried cherries, pecans, brown sugar and cinnamon. This was wrapped in puff pastry, baked and served with vanilla ice cream.

EACH COURSE, excluding the salad, was accompanied by a special wine. A 1979 Bruno Paillard — Brut went with the hors d'oeuvres and a 1983 Mercury Clos de La Rochelette "Faveley" with the appetizer. The entrée was enhanced by a 1979 Morey St. Denis Faveley, and the dessert was paired with a 1984 Moscato d'Oro Robert Mondavi.

After the dinner, Mrs. Lawson gave the guests — Mr. and Mrs. Howard Schaeffer and Mr. and Mrs. Leighton Smith, all of Bloomfield Hills — copies of Famie's newly published cookbook, "The Flavor of Famie," which he autographed for them.

The Lawsons enjoy good food, Wendy said. "My husband and myself, we like to do a lot of our own gourmet cooking. Basically the

French cooking, rich and fattening." She said they also like fine restaurants. On their 20th anniversary in October, they had dinner at Chez Raphael's and Chef Famie looked after them.

"He made us a marvelous dessert, in the shape of a champagne bottle," she said. "He did it special for us."

A resident of Novi, Famie, 26, was raised in Farmington and graduated from Farmington High School. His parents still live in Farmington Hills.

Famie's 136-page, softcover cookbook tells a little about his background in culinary arts, including a vocational cooking course in high school and restaurants in the Detroit area (among them, the Great Dane, the Benchmark and Jacques), Brussels, Belgium; Monte Carlo on the French Riviera, and New York.

THE REST of the book is devoted to recipes, which he claims are basic.

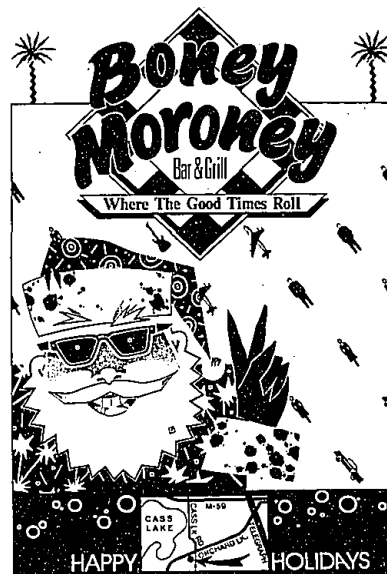
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Chef Keith Famie (center) of Chez Raphael, assisted by Tim Clark, prepares the first course of a dinner for Dr. and Mrs. James

Lawson of Bloomfield Hills, who made the winning bid on the dinner at a benefit auction.

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