

Shops offer tastings and more

There is growing evidence of interest in the consumption of quality wines. Sales of higher-order wines abound. People want to know more about the wines they drink and, when they do consume, they do so at selectively higher levels.

The quest to learn more about wines and to drink better ones can be accommodated in several ways. Three of these readily fall into the domain of the serious wine merchant who is eager to support customers in their learning activities.

Fam Kestrov of the Cheese and Wine Barn in Plymouth is engaged in a program designed to help these interested in wine learn more about it and, consequently, spend their dollars as selectively as possible.

Kestrov recently held a program (one of three annually) for her customers, at Plymouth's Mayflower Hotel. It was designed to help customers select wines they must prefer from a vast array of styles.

THREE REGIONAL distributors (Paul Mann Co., Wine Warehouse and Viviano Importers) each selected a tasting program for her patrons and served the wines in a round-robin fashion. People were allowed to stroll freely about a large room and sample wines from the assort-

ment. Questions could be asked of each distributor, information gleaned.

There were sparkling wines, Bordeaux, Burgundies, chardonnays, sauvignon blancs, zinfandels, cabernets and more, covering red to white, semidry to dry.

This is an excellent way for the interested wine buyer to broaden his or her knowledge of what wine is all about to sample and compare. Too few wine dispensers take this extra effort.

The Cheese and Wine Barn (515 Forest Ave., across the back parking lot from the Mayflower) offers yet a second opportunity for learning. Shelves are stocked with a reasoned selection of wines for all needs, both domestic and imported. The key is having a staff on hand to advise and inform customers. No supermarket concept operating, service of a personal nature is offered.

Besides wine and information, there's a large selection of food and beverages such as tea, coffee, seafoam, packaged goodies, ice cream, imported beers, accessories and a full deli center. This is a true oasis between the Merchant of Vino's three locations in the northern suburbs and the Big Ten and Village Corner wine shops, both in Ann Arbor.



wine
Richard Watson

IN THE metropolitan area, we are indeed fortunate in having other stores that also provide wine tastings and sound advice, together with an excellent selection of foods to accompany the wine.

The Red Wagon Wine Shoppers (one at Maple Road and Main Street in Clawson and one at Rochester and Auburn roads in Rochester) offer a wide choice of cheeses, meats, coffee, candies, teas and more. The wine selection, especially at the Rochester outlet, is hands down the widest in the region, the counsel sound and accommodating.

While the Clawson store still carries too many elements of its origins as a beer dispensary/party store, efforts to rejuvenate it are paying off. It also offers walk-around tastings four times a year, twice each in the spring and fall. A call to either store will put you on the mailing list. The three outlets of the Merchant

of Vino also contain those three elements that Kosteva has captured in her smaller, more personal manner: opportunities to taste and learn, a full wine selection with strong staffs, and a wide food selection.

Indeed, in the food line, no other regional store touches the magic of Eddie Jonah. His splendid Northwestern store abounds in more food than can be reasonably comprehended by mere mortals, and now his newest place (opened in November) at Maple Road and Joyce Street in Birmingham is a place of good taste and decor.

The oldest of the Merchant's stores, at Watties and Rochester roads in Troy, is soon to be razed and replaced with yet another emporium. The Merchant seems to be reducing its efforts in tasting opportunities lately, but a call to any of the stores will advise you of its forthcoming intentions.



Frank Hursley

Courtroom drama staged effectively

Performances of the Avon Players production of "Nuts" by Tom Topor continue through Saturday, March 14, at the playhouse in Rochester Hills. For ticket information, call 733-4660.

Avon Players launched its third production of the season, a commendable staging of the potent courtroom drama "Nuts."

The unrolling suspense of a volatile trial is unleashed in playwright Tom Topor's incisive rendering set in a courtroom of New York's Bellevue Hospital.

At issue is the determination of whether Claudia Draper is mentally competent to stand trial for manslaughter. If she is declared unfit, she will be retained for additional psychiatric manipulation. If she is found competent, she will escape treatment and will be released to civil authorities.

"Nuts" depicts the legal process at work, in a strict adherence to the law that allows a calloused, barebones revelation of tormented souls and the result of their influence on one another in everyday, seamy relationships.

Mattie Wolf's splendid direction has induced the ultimate dramatic impact by keeping the courtroom scene fluid rather than allowing a static give and take from opposite sides of the stage. What comes off is a decided notch above what is expected from community theater.

Talented Sydne Kalst skillfully endows Claudia with the plucky unflinching verve of one ensnared by the system and its incompetents. The only marked flaw of her Claudia came early on when her restless flinching and her pendulum-like footwork would convince anyone within the court that Claudia is in-

deed schizoid.

AFFORDING RELIEF to the dramatic tension, Jim Hughes gives a sterling performance, endowing Dr. Rosenthal with a catalog of nervous tics and contortions as he reacts to the proceedings.

Jon Katz as the defense attorney, Aaron Lovinsky, and Bill Doehring as the prosecuting attorney, Franklin MacMillan, competently handle their roles as the lawyers questioning the defendant and others who take the stand.

Frank Cozzema as Claudia's stepfather, Arthur Kirk, adds some emotional moments when repugnant relationships are revealed. Pat Thompson as Rose Kirk scales, but not quite reaches, the ultimate pathos of Claudia's mother. Ron Augustine gives a faithful portrayal of an understanding Judge Murdoch. Mike Breen's set designed in rich oak tones presents a solid symbol of promised justice.

Frank Hursley of Birmingham, a sales engineer by profession, is a longtime theater buff.

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upcoming things to do

SATRIRICAL REVUE

The University of Pennsylvania Alumni Club of Detroit will present the Mask and Wig 90th annual production, the satirical revue "Bureaucrat? I Hardly Know Ya!" at 8 p.m. Friday, March 13, at Seaborn High School's Little Theatre in Birmingham. After the performance, a reception for the cast will be held at the Birmingham Athletic Club. Performance and patron tickets are available at \$12 and \$30. Performance ticket holders who wish to attend the reception must purchase a \$5 reception ticket. For reservations,

call Jon Greenawalt at 851-4300 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

PURIM CARNIVAL

Corinne Slavish will perform Jewish folktales with audience participation at 1:30 p.m. and Balle Leah Drodin will perform a Purim play, "The Mask of Queen Esther," at 3 p.m. Sunday, March 15, at the Jewish Community Center in West Bloomfield. Admission is free.

SIMON COMEDY

"Last of the Red Hot Lovers," a comedy by Neil Simon, will be presented at 8:30 p.m. Fridays-Satur-

days, March 20-21 and 27-28, and 2 p.m. Sunday, March 22, at the Birmingham Village Players playhouse. Don Brown plays Barney, Debi Jackson is Bobbie, Diane D'Agostino is Elaine and Joann Britton is Jeanette. Tickets at \$5 for adults, \$4 for students are available at the door. For reservations, call 644-2074 anytime.

WRITING SEMINAR

"Writing for Performance" will be taught by New York playwright

Nancy Beckett from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday, March 7, at the Actors Alliance Theatre in Southfield. The seminar explores the techniques developed at New Dramatists in New York and the curriculum of the Yale School of Drama. Seminar fee is \$65 for active participants, who will work on specific writing exercises and discuss results with fellow participants. Fee for observation participants is \$25. For registration call Actors Alliance at 642-1326 weekdays from noon to 6 p.m.

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