

Every night is . . .

Opening night



By Mimi Mayer
special writer

There's a touch of theater to any successful restaurant.

Perhaps no one recognizes this more than Chris Angelosanto, the 29-year-old proprietor of the Appetizer Restaurants in Milford and Birmingham and the newly-opened Appetizer's Country Epicure in Novi.

"When you pull off a Saturday night, you feel like you're up for a Tony Award," Angelosanto said. "You know, it's like you're headlining at the Schubert."

"It's not easy to satisfy people, which we do about 99 percent of the time," he said. "And that's about where we are here."

If the Appetizer Restaurants were theaters, they'd be more akin to the New Center's Attic than to Rochester's Meadowbrook.

ANGELOSANTO POSITIONED his eateries to appeal to sophisticated diners with a taste for the original while offering an occasional classic.

Dinner entrees, for example, range from flounder praline, a sauté of fish, butter and pecans topped with praline liquor, to rack of lamb for one. You may also order, from the same dinner menu, a Reuben sandwich or ziti cerviceo, a pasta vegetable mélange.

Yet these meals are available at moderate prices. Dinners for two accompanied by glasses of house wine and dessert will total — on the average — about \$36 sans tip and taxes. Angelosanto aims to serve top quality foods without the lavishly priced charged by status restaurants. A story illustrates his point: While dining at an upscale eatery, he noticed two items that also appear on the Appetizers' menus — at \$10 a plate more.

THIS APPROACH keeps Angelosanto's profit margin slender. But after spending half his life in the restaurant business, he says he recognizes proper food and service and won't settle for less.

"And I honestly believe the customer is number one. I ended up dismissing an employee recently because they lost sight of that. They were concerned about another important aspect of the restaurant, but they had forgotten the customer."

Not that he feels above censure. Angelosanto said a negative review in a Detroit newspaper prompted him to revamp the original Milford Appetizer from a sandwich

Putting food in the spotlight

shop to a full-service restaurant with a cellar bar.

"A big thing is the willingness to accept criticism and the ability to change. I take it from my friends, my customers, my family, my employees. I've never had a problem with that at all. If they want to point out something, I'll listen," he said.

NOV IS ANGELOSANTO intimidated by challenge.

Maintaining a clear head while putting the restaurateur's 15-hour days is tough. Still, Angelosanto radiates energy. He seems the type to always have a project up his sleeve. An ambitious project.

After patrons at the Milford Appetizer were lined up at the door and spilling onto Main Street, he wanted more.

He nosed out a space in Birmingham, the home of many of Detroit's most demanding diners. He spent a year renovating the site, which opened in May. It is filled five nights a week, Angelosanto said.

Acknowledging he still may fail, Angelosanto has hedged the bet by improving service. He just hired his first maître d' — crut — and he instituted late evening dance parties in Birmingham three weeks ago.

This was concurrent with his adding Novi's Appetizer Country Epicure to his business roster. Formerly the Saratoga Trunk, the Country Epicure has changed in name and menu, duplicating the foods served at the Milford Appetizer.

It's also sharing the Country Epicure responsibilities with his sister, Karen Angelosanto, former manager of Toll Gate restaurant in Dearborn's Hyatt Regency Hotel.

Is this the beginning of a dining dynasty? Will Angelosanto's restaurants some day be as ubiquitous as Chuck Mue? "Whatever comes our way, we'll consider it," Angelosanto said. "But not until we're ready to make an honest move."

Appetizer Milford, 335 N. Main, 685-9989. Serves lunch and dinner Monday through Saturday only. Sunday brunch available. Reservations not accepted.

Appetizer Birmingham, 280 N. Woodward, 646-7001. Serves lunch and dinner Monday through Saturday. Reservations accepted.

Appetizer's Country Epicure, 42050 Grand River, 349-7770. Serves lunch and dinner Monday through Friday and dinner only Saturday. Reservations accepted.



STEPHEN CANTRELL/Staff photographer

Chris Angelosanto, who recently opened his third Appetizer restaurant, compares running a restaurant to putting on a play. "When you pull off a Saturday night, you feel like you're up for a Tony Award," he said.

Perfect menu for the perfect date

By Mimi Mayer
special writer

It's Saturday night, "date night," as the AM disc jockeys used to say.

You've invited a special companion out for the evening and have chosen one of three Appetizer Restaurants as the setting for romance.

We asked Karen Pattyn of Oak Park to select a menu for two that plays up the restaurant's cuteness.

Pattyn, 37-year-old, is a catering service, which has furnished tables for such clients as Troy's Bonwit Teller department store and PR Associates, a downtown public relations firm. Her forte, though, is small private parties.

Pattyn clearly knows her foodstuffs. She's passed on culinary secrets while teaching adult education workshops in Birmingham, Royal Oak and St. Clair Shores.

Currently writing a cookbook, Pattyn has stocked her home library with food reference books that address topics like the timely "Vegetable Cuisine," "Lent and the French" and "Why Plants Don't Have Muscles." Burning questions for those chefs about taste.

FOLLOWING A recent meal, the Milford Appetizer earned a very good rating from Pattyn.

"Unique and original," she summarized the menu.

The presentation was understated yet effective, she said. Fresh garnishes, not the canned pineapple, accompanied her elegant Hawaiian main course.

And, "the servers weren't on. You know how they are at some restaurants. Our waitress didn't have that personality-plus attitude. She was attractive, down-to-earth and knowledgeable."

Other Appetizer touches Pattyn appreciated: Menu descriptions that generally avoided superlatives in favor of straightforward lists of ingredients and cooking methods. Fresh flowers on the tables. The plate glass coverings atop pretty chilis tabuleths at the Milford restaurant. Subtle lighting. Gleaming white crockery. The choice of raw sugar, white sugar in festive tubes or good ol' Sweet 'N Low.

So how did these and these?

Although the Appetizer serves five or six dinner specialties daily — many of them seafood — Pattyn secured the 59-item standard dinner menu for a his-and-her meal.

For him, she selected an Italian meal starring veal, served with soup and salad, two vegetables and, quoting the menu, "appropriate carbohydrate." Her a la carte dinner combines seafood, a salad and a chicken main course. Pattyn's comments follow.

APPETIZERS: For her: moules à la marinere, mussels steamed with wine and seasonings. "The mussels, I imagine, are a house specialty. The menu says it's the best in Detroit, and it's listed at the top of the menu. They have to try it."

For him: spinach tortellini de firenze. Small spinach pasta pillows stuffed with cheese. "He is going Italian, plus the restaurant makes its own pasta. I liked the creamy tomato sauce. It's unusual."

SOUPS/SALADS: For her: Eastern Market salad, "sort of a glorified Maurice," but less hearty than the unusual steak or chicken breast and sprouts salads also offered.

For him: minestrone soup, the Italian classic, although "I might go for the soup du jour if it were Italian."

MAIN COURSES: For her: chicken Hawaiian. "I had this and it was delicious. The breading was light with just a bit of coconut. I got a whole breast of chicken, which was perfectly done."

The accompanying plat, seasoned with turmeric or saffron was tasty, but the sweet and sour sauce "overwhelmed the chicken. Still, I'd order it again."

For him: veal zingara. Less commonplace than the veal piccata also listed. The dish features veal scallops coated in egg and sautéed. The sauce also "appealed to me. It's a jumble of mushrooms and prosciutto (an Italian specialty ham). I've never seen sautéed mushrooms. It would be a pretty dish." The "appropriate carbohydrate" is, of course, pasta.

DESSERTS: For her: chocolate mousse bar. A rich confection of chocolate mousse glazed with a dark chocolate frosting. "Chocolate heaven."

For him: pecan diamonds. Another sweet more like candy than dessert, served in a star shape. "I love pecan pie, and that's what I expected. What I got was a creamy dish more like a praline." It's also become the pride of the Appetizers, since the recipe was printed in Bon Appetit magazine.

The cost for this repast? Approximately \$43, excluding tax, tip and beverages. You can sip cocktails or beer from the full-service bar or choose from more than 63 wines. A bottle of wine will add \$10 to \$175 to your bill, and vineyard does not appear on the wine list.

Then, if you can still move, stagger over to the dance floor set up in the Birmingham Appetizer on Thursday through Saturday nights. Top 40 music plays from 10:30 p.m. till closing with an appetizer bar available until 1 a.m.

It makes your date night a late night but, oh, what a way to go.

Smoke on your own time

Is there a time during business hours when smoking isn't frowned upon? Nowadays I always feel guilty when smoking around my non-smoking colleagues.

The simple rule to follow is don't smoke in the presence of non-smoking business associates. Non-smokers are generally prejudiced when it comes to smokers. Leave the office and go to some private spot to smoke if the urge is making it difficult to concentrate. These days there are no "good" times to smoke during business hours.

I know how important remembering names is to a sales representative. What is an easy way to do this?

The most important sound to everyone is their name pronounced correctly. When introduced, repeat the name in your reply: "I've looked forward to meeting you, Deborah, John, etc." Visualize the name spelled out as you say it, repeat the name as often as you can in the course of conversation without seeming obvious. If necessary, ask someone you know to give you the name you've forgotten. If the name is beyond recall and you must use it, then say, "I'm sorry, would you give me your name again, please." But try not to ask this twice; once can be understood, but twice in business is bad form.

How do you handle paying for

business meals?

Because breakfast is usually more casual than lunch or dinner, the bill will probably be paid in cash. Tell the waiter or waitress when your order is taken that the bill is yours if you're done the inviting. If credit cards are appropriate then arrive early and give your card to the host or hostess and tell them to write up the bill on your charge. Remember, if someone invites you to breakfast, lunch, tea or dinner, they pay. If you invite them, you pay. If you are the guest, don't offer to leave the tip. Do follow up with a thank you note if it was an interview type of invitation. Call attention to the pleasant conversation and the encouragement you felt.

Twinkle, twinkle little swimsuit, but please don't go near the water

AP — "Mother, may I go out to swim? Yes, my darling daughter; hang your clothes on a hickory limb, but don't go near the water."

That's especially good advice if you're wearing the latest creation from Shana Swimwear — a black, sleek, seamless one-piece tank suit with 25 twinkling lights that blink in a random pattern.

The \$100 suit wasn't meant for the water, designer Sue Cohen said.

"I did it because I thought it would be a lot of fun," she said.

"People expect and almost demand new things coming out of Shana."

"I always say I'm not going to do anything new and I always do."

The idea for adding flashing lights to one of her proven suit designs came to Cohen while she was riding an exercise bike at a local fitness club.

"It was a flash," she recalled. "I pictured the suit lighting up but not necessarily blinking."

"First, we tried to solder LEDs (like the digital lights in a watch) but that wasn't working. I went to Los Angeles and made a million phone calls before finally locating the tiny hobby lights."

The lights are powered by AAA batteries concealed in a battery pack that looks like the buckle on the silver belt of the suit. Cohen says one set of batteries lights the suit for more than 20 hours.

"To me the suit has kind of a cosmic look to it like outer space," Cohen says. "I'm inspired by concepts like that."