

taste buds.  
chef Larry  
Janes

## Putting the fizz in soda

Traditionally, Michigan residents traveling out of state can be recognized by their insistence on calling carbonated beverages "pop." Instead of "soft drinks." In most states, "pop" refers to someone's father.

State idiosyncrasies aside, North Americans love their carbonated beverages, whether they call them pop, soda or soft drinks, whether they chug them from bottles, cans, cartons, boxes or pouches.

The soft drink industry experienced a growth that in the early '80s had every man, woman and child annually guzzling some 620 eight-ounce servings of soft drinks. That works out to an average of some 13 ounces daily.

NOW, I'll be the first to admit that one of my favorite potables is a 7-Eleven Big Gulp with just a smattering of ice and filled to the brim with Diet Pepsi. I've got so many empty 7-Eleven Big Gulp cups in the front seat of my car that it usually takes a garbage bag to get rid of them.

I'm a soft drink junkie.

I'll even admit that the only reason I watched the Tyson-Spinks boxing match was to view "the fight before the fight." In a commercial that was almost longer than the main event, Pepsi supposedly beat out Coke, according to Pepsi.

Soft drinks are generally, but not always, carbonated, and contain a sweetening agent, edible acids and natural or artificial flavors. Today, everywhere people work or play, soft drinks are available. Consumption reflects their availability and advertising budgets.

SO WHERE did it all begin? In 1772, Englishman Joseph Priestley described a pleasant tasting, sparkling drink he produced by introducing carbon dioxide into the water. Thus, carbonated beverages were born.

In 1806, the real business of selling soft drinks was started by Benjamin Silliman, a chemistry professor at Yale. He started bottling carbonated water and selling it. Sometime after 1830, flavored soda water became popular, and by 1860, the census reported 123 plants producing carbonated drinks.

In 1886, a druggist and former Confederate soldier named John S. St. John created a drink that lives on in the hearts and bellies of many today, cola. He added an extract from the African kola nut to the extract from cocoa. Sound familiar? (Coca cola.)

It wasn't until 1893 that a famed Detroit druggist with the last name of Hires introduced bottled root beer. Currently, the most popular flavors of soft drinks, are, in order: cola, lemon lime, orange, ginger ale, root beer and grape.

NOW FOR the bad news.

Soda pop now provides some 8 percent of the calories consumed daily by the average person, with virtually all the calories coming from sugar. Soda pop also accounts for approximately 25 percent of our refined sugar consumption. Our yearly consumption of soft drinks surpasses milk, beer and coffee.

The precise formula of most soft drinks isn't well known. However, certain soft drinks are governed by the standards of identity enforced by the Food and Drug Administration.

HOW DOES all the so-called good stuff end up in the bottle? First off, the water used is subject to processing including chlorination, treatment with lime, coagulation, sedimentation and sand filtration. Then it is treated with activated carbon. The syrup is the complete mixture of all the ingredients necessary to make the carbonated water.

Carbonation is accomplished by a process where a measured amount of syrup is placed in a washed bottle and a carbonated water is added. A constant carbon pressure prevents the loss of carbonation.

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JERRY ZOLYNSKY/staff photographer

Enjoying some Florida fare on the deck of the Key Largo restaurant are (left) Carl Thorsberg of Wixom and (right) Lela Johnson of Walled Lake. They're assisted (center) by Maureen Maher, a restaurant employee.

# FLORIDA FARE

By Michele MacWilliams  
special writer

**I**F YOU'VE EVER VISITED South Florida, the Caribbean Islands or the Bahamas, you know how seafood fresh from the ocean can taste. Lobster, shrimp and clam dishes spiced with seasonings prevalent in the region are favorites of most travelers.

Although most of us can't hop on a plane and head south every time we yearn for tropical cuisine, we now can savor the flavor of the tropics right here in Michigan.

With seafood markets and seafood sections in grocery stores increasing in popularity, a taste of the Caribbean is only as far as your local supermarket. Or, if you prefer to let the experts do the cooking, at least one local restaurant specializes in food from the islands.

Key Largo, on the shore of Walled Lake, brings the Florida Keys a little closer to home. A gray-tip shark hangs from the ceiling and mahimahi, sailfish, barracuda and tarpon adorn the walls. Wait staff sport tropical shirts with khaki shorts and large windows overlook the open air deck and Walled Lake beyond.

Tropical cuisine, as described by the restaurant's executive chef Frank Christian, blends foods prevalent in coastal Florida, the Caribbean and surrounding islands.

Although there isn't one single cooking style, all tropical cuisine uses the fresh ingredients that abound in the warm climate, such as citrus fruit, shrimp, oysters, clams, conch and other saltwater fish, avocado, papaya, corn, eggplant and an assortment of fresh vegetables. Spices, introduced to the region by its various settlers, are what make the cuisine unique to the area. African, British, Dutch, French, Indian and Spanish influences are found in the cooking processes and choice of spices.

The first known settlers in the Caribbean were the Arawak Indians, who brought garlic, sweet potatoes, papaya and allspice to the islands. With the arrival of Semboile Indians,



came the process of cooking food on wood grates they called babacoa. Today we call this cooking form barbecue.

French settlers introduced Cajun cooking to the area. Although Cajun cuisine has been popular in the south for centuries, its hot spices and charred cooking technique have become a national favorite only within the past five years.

With African slaves brought over to work on sugar plantations came peas, beans, peanuts and okra. Another prominent spice, curry, made it's way to our Southern coastal states when slavery was abolished and plantation owners looked to the Chinese and East Indians for labor.

Today the predominance of these cultures, plus the influences of Cubans, Haitians, Puerto Ricans, inhabitants of Barbados, Jamaica and Trinidad, can all be tasted in Florida and its tropical cuisine.

To try a sample of these treats, we ventured to Key Largo Restaurant. Opened in May 1987, the restaurant offers fare that's "serious food but fun to eat," according to co-owner Roger Kazanowski.

Christian incorporates the restaurant's tropical theme into dishes not usually found north of the Mason-Dixon line. Cajun popcorn (Louisiana crawfish tails fried in a spicy Cajun batter), Key West conch fritters, almond butter shrimp, Cajun barbecue shrimp, Tahiti stir-fry and, of course, Key lime pie, are just some of the treats found on Key Largo's menu.

As an accompaniment to the tropical cuisine, Christian suggests one of the popular rum and fruit drinks for which the islands are noted, such as a Bahama Mama, Goombay Smash or Yellow Bird. If sweet drinks aren't to your liking, the chef says beer goes well, too.

To bring a little Caribbean cooking into your home, Christian provides us with a few recipes. Key Largo bartender Karla Bradshaw added instructions for her Goombay Smash and Bahama Mama.

So, whether you're on a Caribbean Island overlooking the ocean or sitting in your backyard gazing out over the barbecue grill and swing set, you can savor the flavor of the tropics.

## Picking the best of the melon patch

By Anne Lehmann  
special writer

It's that time of year again, when the fruit bins strain with the weight of juicy, fragrant melons.

Cantaloupes, honeydews, crenshaw, casahuate, persian, Juan and Canaries are low in calories, rich in vitamins A and C and can add a touch of elegance to the simplest of meals. Colorful and flavorful, they make wonderful decorative centerpieces and are light and refreshing whether eaten for breakfast or dessert.

Cristopher Columbus was seeking a fan of those muscled fruits, see the Carriacou notes in his book "The Gringo's" that he planted them

in the New World March 23, 1494. "We know the date," he writes, "because he considered it important enough to note in his record of expeditions."

The most popular and easily found variety of melons are cantaloupes and honeydews. The most reliable and least costly of these fruits, the cantaloupe, has a relatively long season, lasting six months from June to November.

Grown mainly in California and the Southwest, these fruits are best bought when they are firm and unyielding, bearing in mind that they will continue to ripen at room temperature.

The melon should give slightly

when pressed and be fragrant. Also, a general rule of thumb about melon buying is to avoid ones that squeak when shaken. Generally they will be mushy and may have already started to sour. Also, avoid soft melons.

Honeydews, which are the sweetest melons, if not the sweetest fruit, should be ripe at the time of purchase and refrigerated immediately. Once the fruit is picked, it will not continue to ripen. This oral smooth skinned melon with light green flesh is grown mainly in California as well as Texas and Arizona. Though imports sometimes makes it possible to enjoy these fruits year round, their peak season is from June to October.

How do you choose the best of the crop? According to Jack Mordich in his book "Buying Produce," "choose one that smells like a flower, is the color of butter, has a slight give at the blossom end and feels like a baby's bottom."

Crenshaw melons are a hybrid between persian and casahuate melons, and are all-around winners. Large in size (weighing up to 19 pounds per melon), the golden skin is smooth and velvety with no netting, rather lengthwise ribbing and is flat-bottomed with a pointed end stem.

The salmon colored thick-skinned flesh has a rich aroma and a juicy spicy flavor, but will taste like squash if isn't fully matured. Like

cantaloupes, crenshaws will ripen at room temperature. Supplies of these melons peak from August through October.

Persian melons look like large cantaloupes that are sweeter and have finer, flatter netting. The pink orange meat is mildly sweet in taste and has a distinctive musky aroma. Availability is best between August and September, with California again being the major supplier of these fruits.

The sweet and juicy Juan Canary melon looks like luscious-colored honeydews, but are extremely delicate. They tend to be too firm or too

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