

taste buds
chef Larry
Janes



Too much pizza is a rarity

Yours truly was a last-minute full-in judge for the "Pizza Pizzazz" contest recently at Detroit's Cobo Hall.

More than 55 of the state's best pizza parlors heated up their ovens, vying for the title at the Great Lakes Food Service Show, sponsored by the Michigan Restaurant Association.

After sampling more than 40 different pizza creations, I can now appreciate and understand the true meaning of "stuffed." I've had my fill of pizza for a long, long time (at least till after next week's bowling game).

So how does one get to be a judge at a pizza contest? Talk about being at the wrong place at the wrong time. I started out to check the food show and to do a feature mentioning my editor, Ethel Simmons, one of the judges of this year's contest.

I HAD JUST had a late breakfast and downed a Big Gulp in the car on the way down to Cobo. Upon entering the show, I was grabbed by Michelle MacWilliams, who handles public relations for the Michigan Restaurant Association, and offered the chance to judge along with Ethel, Reid Ashton and son Chris (from the Golden Mushroom), along with Al Allen from WJRH-TV, Kathy Jackson from Crain's Detroit Business magazine, Lisa Broncato from WHIC and John McMurray, WJRH's staff meteorologist.

Just imagine tasting pizza with bacon, lettuce and tomato; pizza with pesto and Alfredo sauce; pizza with apples, maraschino cherries and whipped cream; pizza with graham cracker crust, with wheat crusts, with sesame crusts — the combinations were endless, and some outrageous.

But thanks to a never-ending supply of cold beer (who eats pizza without a beer?) and an occasional well-hidden belch, the task of choosing a winner really wasn't that difficult.

It was evident most of the entrants had not read the contest rules. All entries were to be judged "pizza as art," showcasing the talent of creating not just the best-tasting pizza in the state but also the most beautiful. The judges first strolled the floor, looking for the "best-dressed pizza," prior to the cooking process. Ingredients were checked and the participants asked questions such as "What cheese blend do you use?" or "Were the ingredients natural or canned?" Was the sauce spread to the edges uniformly? Were the toppings applied with care or were they just heaped on, trying to impress more with weight than artistic creation?

And the results?

AFTER THE FINAL samplings were finished (and the judges opted for popping hot rolls from complimentary rolls), the results were tabulated: winner of a weekend at Stuss or Shanty Creek was Shield's pizza on Telegraph Road just north of Ten Mile Road in Southfield.

Anyone who remembers the original Shield's on Davison in Detroit can appreciate why the judges ruled Shield's the best pizza in Michigan. A deep, thick crust and just the right amount of cheese, topped with

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Singular meal

Bachelor cooks tasty dinners for one

By Geri Rinachier
special writer

WHEN LEE CACCIAGLIA was growing up in Michigan he was surrounded by women who loved to cook — his mom and his four sisters.

As the youngest of seven children, there was very little room left in his mother's kitchen for him to experiment. But today, he is a master in his Lathrup Village kitchen.

After retiring from the Ford Motor Credit Co. six years ago, his interest in cooking was renewed and became one of his favorite pastimes.

"I don't like eating out at fast food places," he said. "Too many restaurants serve burgers and fries or foods high in cholesterol."

Cacciaglia attributes his taste for fine, healthy eating not only to his mother's Italian specialties but also to their family garden filled with fresh vegetables. But cooking for one can be challenging, especially after watching his mother prepare dinners for a family of nine.

"I WATCHED my mom do all this stuff, making minestrone, pasta al pesto and other Northern Italian dishes," he said. "My mother and my older sister taught me to make many of these dishes, and at first there were a few disasters."

"Then I had the opportunity to meet cooking teacher Neil Benedict and became one of her students at the Birmingham Community House. The techniques she taught me have been incredible."

Most of her classes feature French, Italian and Chinese dishes, and Cacciaglia loves cooking all of them. "Neil is a fabulous cook. She's my cooking idol," he said.

Too often singles, widows and widowers don't take enough time to prepare a healthy meal. It's so much easier to grab a snack that needs little or no preparation at dinnertime. But, in order to plan for a healthy meal that needs little preparation, more thought must be put into grocery shopping.

A little planning before going to the store can help. As a single, Cacciaglia has found changing the typical style of grocery shopping makes a difference and eases the pain of eating healthy.

SHOPPING AT fresh meat and fish markets not only provides him with fresh ingredients but allows him the opportunity to purchase one veal chop or one fillet of fish. The other important part of this concept is to plan a specific day just for food shopping, making sure you're stocking up on all the best of the four food groups: grains, dairy, fruits and vegetables, and meat and fish. Also, scheduling an extra 15 to 30 minutes a week into your food shopping allows you to spend more time carefully reading the labels and list of ingredients.

When it comes to food preparation, Cacciaglia doesn't have a lot of gadgets.

"It's a waste of money to invest in a lot of kitchen gadgets when all you need is a good set of knives for dicing and chopping."

Cacciaglia does own a microwave but uses it basically for some initial food preparation, such as melting butter, steaming, and as an extra warming oven for party entertaining.

Much of his baking and broiling is done in a toaster oven. Obviously, a toaster oven uses less energy but consider its other assets: It preheats faster and is easier to clean. Cacciaglia likes to spray the broiler rack with a non-stick spray. His other advice for efficient meal planning and execution is to prepare in advance as much of the meal as you can in the morning.

"Lots of the peeling and chopping can be done hours before you're ready to serve as long as the



Lee Cacciaglia of Lathrup Village sits down to a home-cooked meal he has prepared for himself.

Herb-Baked Chicken Breast with Oven-Browned Potatoes is just one of his fast and easy specialties

'My mother and my older sister taught me to make many of these dishes, and at first there were a few disasters.'

food is covered and refrigerated."

HIS FAVORITE dishes for entertaining are those that can be made totally in advance. Among them are cannelloni, gnocchi, and corned beef and cabbage. He uses crepes as the base for his cannelloni and often makes them a day in advance, preparing the filling the morning of the party.

Cacciaglia also loves entertaining. Among favorite theme parties he had recently were a soup tasting and an evening with oysters and champagne. His style of entertaining is focused around "keeping the party simple, unstuffy, so my guests feel comfortable and relaxed."

Parties such as the soup tasting allows his guests to serve themselves. Cacciaglia generally selects three different soups served as the main course, accompanied by good crusty French or Italian bread, salad, and dessert such as Lemon Creme Crepes.

Here are a few of Cacciaglia's recipes he prepares for himself as well as when he entertains.

Herbed crumbs make flavorful chicken breast

HERB-BAKED CHICKEN BREAST
WITH OVEN-BROWNED
POTATOES

- 1 split chicken breast with or without skin
- 2 tablespoons herbed bread crumbs
- 1 large potato, peeled and quartered
- paprika

Marinade:

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 teaspoon lemon juice
- ¼ teaspoon dried thyme
- ¼ teaspoon dried marjoram
- 1 garlic clove, crushed
- salt and pepper to taste

Preheat toaster oven or conventional oven to 425 degrees. Toss chicken breasts in marinade and set aside 15 minutes. Brush some of the marinade on the potato. Place potato in a baking dish large enough to hold potato and chicken and bake for 15 minutes. Remove dish and add chicken, bone side

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Chinese cuisine comes naturally from garden plot

By Janice Brunson
staff writer

After nearly 40 years of labor, Shee Fon Ong and wife, Sim, said their laundry and dry cleaning business in Detroit last year and retired into a new home in West Bloomfield.

The home, a small condominium, has a postage-stamp-sized yard that is dominated by an enormous pumpkin vine loaded with young fruit ripening for a Halloween harvest.

The pumpkins are for Jonathan, 3, and Jennifer, 5, the Ongs' bilingual grandchildren. Life-sized porcelain dolls who are clearly the center of their grandparents' universe.

While the pumpkin vine is meant to please the youngest members of the family, other gardening pursuits by the senior Ongs are of a more serious nature.

Their garden in the West Bloom-

field Community Garden on Maple Road supplies the family year-round with staple fruits and vegetables that enable the Ongs and daughter-in-law Betty Ong to prepare traditional family cuisine.

Without the garden, essential items like winter and bitter melons, Chinese long beans and unusual varieties of mustard greens and spinach would simply not be available, according to the Ongs, who say even specialty grocers hardly ever carry the produce.

"ALL CHINESE," every people who cook it, know," said Sim Ong, 65, of the unique vegetables that remain a mystery to most Western chefs.

Sim learned of their scarcity in the U.S. shortly after settling in the modern city of Detroit in 1949. She was a young bride, recently arrived



Shee Fon Ong, his wife Sim, and granddaughter Jennifer, 5, are surrounded by vines of bitter melons in the couple's West Bloomfield

from a rural village near Canton (now Guangzhou) in southern China.

Detroit's Chinatown at Cass and Peterboro streets was considerably larger then, perhaps twice as large a community as the estimated 15,000 Chinese who are now scattered throughout the metropolitan area.

Today, Chinatown is near Third and Michigan avenues, primarily populated by people originally from Hong Kong and Taiwan.

"New small before, lots bigger," Shee Fon said, in describing the size of Detroit's Chinatown when he arrived here in 1935 as a youth of 19

years, determined to make his way in the United States. He returned to China briefly in 1948 to marry Sim.

Chinese grocers in Detroit catered to the old community, selling produce upon which Chinese housewives

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Dishes are Cantonese

By Janice Brunson
staff writer

China, a vast country with wide variations in climate and agricultural traditions, also sports distinct regional cuisines.

Shee Fon Ong and wife, Sim, originally hail from a small village in Guangdong province in southern China. Because of heavy emigration from the area at the turn of the century, it is best known in the West.

Westerners know the region as Canton, birthplace of sumptuous Cantonese cuisine that features parboiled food that is steamed or stir-fried and subtly spiced with oyster and soy sauces, garlic or ginger root.

Noted as the rice bowl of China, Canton Province is also known for dim sum, delicious snacks that are served as a light lunch or afternoon tea.

Treasured recipes of the Ong family are difficult to put into measurements because the Ongs have never before thought to do so. The entrees are prepared by touch and taste,

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