



taste buds

chef Larry Janes



Grapefruit won't make you skinny

I just came back from a short visit at Momma's. When I offered to take her and Dad out to dinner at their favorite restaurant (the Sign of the Beefcarver), I was interrupted with the classic New Year's phrase, "Sorry, we're on our diets."

When questioned about what type of a diet they were "on," I was told about this miracle diet that was passed along on a Xeroxed sheet of paper from Uncle Bill that had the follower eating grapefruit before every meal.

Momma couldn't believe the results — she had lost more than six pounds in just two days! (Sounds like they were weighing themselves on the carpet again.)

So, the thought came to me to do a little research and check out if grapefruit really was the dietetic panacea that Momma thinks.

Sorry, Momma.

SEEMS THAT the old grapefruit has an uncertain history that may have had its beginnings as a "bad sport" or mutation from some other type of citrus tree.

It was first noticed in Barbados in 1750 when it was called the "small shaddock" because it bore a resemblance to the pumello or shaddock, which was brought to Barbados from Indonesia by a Captain Shaddock of the English East India Company.

The name "grapefruit" was first used in Jamaica in 1814. It is thought the name arose because the trees bore large clusters of fruit that resembled clusters of grapes. It was first planted in Florida but didn't become a successful commercial crop until the 1880s.

NOW FOR the bad news . . .

There is no scientific documentation on record that shows the consumption of grapefruit prior, with or after meals will enhance weight reduction.

Yes, it is true that grapefruit is low in calories and is a good source of fiber. In its fresh state, grapefruit has excellent amounts of pectin, potassium, vitamin C and other vitamin-like substances.

But as the "magic potion" label that Momma has bestowed upon it to lose weight — well, that has yet to be proven. Granted, if you only eat grapefruit, you will experience weight loss. Same goes for Southern Comfort Manhattans.

As far as Momma's claim that eating grapefruit before meals will make her lose weight, that is a distinct possibility. Grapefruit, as with any other fruit (or juice), will serve to fill you up faster. Therefore, you eat lesser quantities of foods (presumably speaking, of course).

But that magical potion that "burns off the fat" even while you sleep?

Sorry, Momma.

WHATEVER YOU DO, please don't stop eating grapefruit. As quoted earlier, it is an excellent source of vitamins and nutrients and is especially loaded with vitamin C. Just don't expect two grapefruit per day to be the missing link in helping you shed those little love handles that mysteriously appeared during the holidays.

Sorry, Momma.

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Patti Ostach, wife of manager Phil Ostach, digs into one of the big, three-egg omelettes that are a breakfast attraction at the Birmingham Cafe. She enjoys spinach and Swiss cheese omelette along with herbal tea.

DAN DEAN/staff photographer

Breakfast — it's a biggie

By Charlene Mitchell
special writer

Calorie counters and cholesterol worriers may not want to face this fact, but the big, hearty breakfast is back in vogue.

This isn't to say that fresh fruit, yogurt and low-calorie health foods are losing ground, but for some hearty appetites only a filling breakfast will start the day off right.

Area cateries specializing in early-morning menus are conscious of the fact that a lot of us are concerned about not putting on extra pounds, and have adjusted their recipes accordingly.

Bode's in Plymouth has been serving 5 a.m. breakfast for nearly 18 years. Only in the last couple of years has the owner-chef, Richard Meacham, been asked to cut back on some of the butter and salt.

"Lately, they ask if we use real eggs," said Meacham, who took over the longtime restaurant in 1979.

"So far, they do want real eggs, not the imitation kind, but we do have six regular breakfast customers who eat just the whites."

Meacham said that scrambled egg whites or an omelette made without the yolk do look a little strange, but they're a lot lighter.

Let's get back to what this story is all about. The big, hearty breakfast that may be a bit heavy on the calorie count, but is mm-mm-good all the way to the last bite.

At Bode's it's the restaurant's famous corned beef hash served up in a heaping pile alongside two farm fresh eggs with toast and coffee.

At the popular Birmingham Cafe it's big bowls of Quaker oats topped with butter, raisins, fresh cream, cinnamon and brown sugar. A stack of toast on the side, and maybe even a side of bacon and eggs to go along with it.

If that sounds like a lot of food for a sunrise appetite, it is, but some early birds say it's the only way to go.

"Our customers are a real mix of different kinds of people," said Phil Ostach, owner-chef of the Birmingham Cafe. "Some just come in for coffee, but others like to eat a very full breakfast early in the morning before work, but they don't want to cook it themselves."

Running neck and neck with oatmeal, the gold medal of breakfasts at the Birmingham Cafe is what the chef calls "the ultimate omelette." At a glance this omelette looks more like it is made to feed a group rather than one individual, and often two people will split it.

"It's a big omelette, but it's full of all kinds of very healthy things," said Ostach, whose command of physics tells you that he didn't grow up eating diet food.

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Flavored pizza crusts have 'edge in taste'

By Ariene Funk
special writer

Bite into the crunchy pizza crust and savor the smooth, buttery flavor of fresh parmesan cheese.

You're tasting one of the flavored crusts available at the Hungry Howie's pizza chain, headquartered in Livonia.

"I think the flavored crust adds a nice touch," said Steven Jackson, 34, president of Hungry Howie's. "I don't know of anyone else who's doing it."

Hungry Howie's takes a basic pizza and fancies up the crust with the customer's choice of seven flavors, or seasonings: plain, sesame seed, buttered, buttered parmesan cheese, poppy seed, rye and garlic.

Each bite of the warm and spicy crust is packed with flavor. There is no extra charge for the special crusts, which Hungry Howie's calls "the edge in taste."

The flavors have been available for around two years. In the fiercely competitive pizza market, it's a way of stepping away from the pack, according to Jackson, a 1973 graduate of Garden City East High School.

"WE WANTED to find the market areas that weren't overly developed and then utilize these opportunities to the fullest," Jackson said. "It's a nice niche for us. There was a time period when every customer said, 'What's a flavored crust?'"

Hungry Howie's was founded in the Detroit area in 1973 and currently has 142 stores in six states — Michigan, Florida, California, Colorado, Georgia and North Carolina. There are 45 stores in the metro Detroit area. Franchising began in 1982.

The chain has no sit-down restaurants. All are carry-out or delivery service. Pizzas are two-for-one price. A family of four can dine for around \$10.

"At first we were the typical mom and pop shops," specializing in pizza and submarine sandwiches, Jackson said.

COMPANY OFFICIALS are local people, many with several years' experience with other pizza companies or fast-food restaurants.

Jackson, a Farmington Hills resident, scrapped his plans to become an elementary school teacher when

he discovered the pizza business.

He dropped out of Eastern Michigan University in his senior year and teamed up with Jim Hearn, a former Dearborn Heights man who now oversees the Hungry Howie's operations in Florida.

The company's director of franchise is Al Abdou, 28, of Northville. He grew up in Redford and Farmington, graduating in 1978 from Farmington High School.

JIM SMITH, 26, of Westland trains new franchisees and employees. Much of the training takes place in the Hungry Howie's store in Redford.

"Most of the customers don't know about the flavored crust," said Smith, as he slathered tomato sauce on the unbaked pizza and tossed on onions, green pepper and Italian sausage.

"But it's making a big surge," Smith said.

Employees are trained to suggest the flavors when orders are taken, he said. Periodic taste tests also are aimed at increasing customer awareness.

According to Smith, the pizzas are "dressed" with the usual ingredients before flavors are added along the edge.

THE SESAME seed flavor is one

of the more popular varieties, Smith said. First, water is sprin-



ART EMANUELE/staff photographer

Employee Tom O'Hara shows one of the flavored-crust pizzas, fresh from the oven, at Hungry Howie's in Redford.

kled lightly onto the perimeter of the unbaked crust. Then the seeds are dusted on. The water holds them in place.

The pizza is whisked into a conveyor oven, set at 450 degrees. The baking rack moves along slowly. The pie emerges, six minutes later, golden-brown, deliciously fragrant and ready to eat.

The buttered and buttered parmesan cheese flavors are added after baking so they will melt into the warm crust.

"IT DEPENDS on location, but the buttered cheese and sesame seed are generally our most popular flavors," Smith said.

Hungry Howie's is just one of several locally based pizza chains. Little Caesars of Farmington Hills is moving to downtown Detroit, and Domino's is based near Ann Arbor.

Abdou calls the local market the "proving grounds" for acceptance. Jackson said metro Detroit is, "bar none, the most competitive in the country."

"Pizza is becoming more popular all over the country," he said. "It's a good food and it's a nutritious product."