

Excalibur's executive chef turns restauranteur

By Alice Collins
staff writer

Executive chef Marty Wilk turned into restauranteur Marty Wilk this month when he became sole owner of Southfield's popular Excalibur restaurant.

Excalibur's been an integral part

of Wilk's life since shortly after it was opened by Pat Archer in 1978 during the peak of the disco craze to become one of the hottest discotheques in metropolitan Detroit. It's since settled into a popular restaurant — featuring prime beef, pasta and flown-in seafood — with dancing and entertainment.

Wilk's life dream was to own a restaurant. Now, at 32, it's come true.

"It's every chef's dream to own his own business," Wilk said last week. "I knew what I wanted early in life."

Wilk worked for Archer as executive chef and basically managed the

restaurant. And he continued in that capacity after Archer died about 18 months ago. By buying the Excalibur stock from the Archer estate, Wilk becomes sole stockholder.

The restaurant, at 28875 Franklin Road, is at one of Southfield's high-profile intersections — where

Northwestern, Franklin and 12 Mile come together.

ONE OF THE FIRST things Wilk wants to do is alter the image of some that Excalibur is exclusive and out of range for many, "Excalibur's intimidating to a lot of people," said Wilk. "They remember the times when Liza Minnelli and Frank Sinatra came around. We opened as a trendy. But that's not what we are now."

Also, the restaurant's maintained a dress code that required men to wear a sport coat after 7 p.m.

In order to make it less intimidating, Wilk started a 4-7 p.m. cocktail hour, "relaxed the dress code a little," and, yes, is now accepting food orders via the fax.

"For the cocktail hour we're advertising affordable drinks — that's better than saying reduced prices — and we serve complimentary, cooked-to-order hors d'oeuvres. That way the customer doesn't have to pick food out of a common dish."

As for the dress code, "we certainly do not let in blue jeans," he said. "But slacks and a nice sweater, I've got to let in. We want to get away from the intimidation factor."

Wilk started in the restaurant business when he was 14 years old. While he was going to school he worked at the London Chop House in Detroit as an apprentice. After graduating from Chadsey High School, he went to Schoolcraft College to become a chef.

"I started everything early in life," he said. "I married my wife Karen at 18. We now have three lovely children and live in Farmington Hills."



GUY WARREN/staff photographer

Marty Wilk, chef/owner of Excalibur, still spends time in the kitchen. His childhood dream was to own his own restaurant. At 32, it's come true.

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