

taste buds

chef Larry Janes

Your party deserves a change

Here it is early June, a time when flowers bloom, strawberries ripen and graduation-party hosts and hostesses scour major food magazines for new ideas. Everyone wants his or her party to be special and that's kind of difficult when you serve cocktail wienies along with corn chips and ranch dip.

There's little disputing the fact that a great party begins with planning. If you plan a graduation party, you can count on the weather being either in the 90s with ditto humidity or ushering in a thunderstorm that undoubtedly will blow all the tents and umbrellas you borrowed or rented into the neighbor's yard, forcing all the guests to huddle in a steamy basement full of dirty laundry and boxes of Christmas ornaments you still haven't put away.

If you plan a graduation party, don't forget you may need an oven larger than the State of Rhode Island to handle the meat, potatoes, beans, vegetables, bread, rolls and hot appetizers. Empty the oven if it has been filled with crud-encrusted pots and pans you temporarily stored there to keep from your guests' eyes.

All kidding aside, a little planning can take those unexpected challenges and turn them into conquered feats.

A GOOD PLANNER will always take the weather into account. Alternate plans, seating arrangements and adequate space should always be available. The difference between a food schlepper and a caterer is that a caterer should always make a pre-site inspection or, at least, give you a list of needed equipment the caterer will/will not supply.

Although food magazines can be a great source for creative ideas, a good planner will have selected and tested all recipes so as not to be surprised when the meatball recipe turns into taco filling. This doesn't happen as much with the big food magazines because their recipes are tested numerous times before publication but, rest assured, get a recipe from a relative or friend and it's bound to happen.

Some of the more trendy foods on the party circuit this year are:

- Salsas: What used to be ordinary salsa in a jar and yellow corn chips has turned into black bean salsa with blue corn tortilla chips. Homemade salsas using fresh ingredients and the discovery of the imported food store make this a sure bet.

- Stuffed Veggies: Everything from stuffed grape leaves to stuffed hearts of palm to mini-stuffed cherry tomatoes, stuffing vegetables is the heart-healthy alternative to wing dings and grape-jelly-coated meatballs. Better yet, you can do this all days in advance.

- Grilling parties: If your yard can handle it, beg, borrow or steal three more barbecue grills and have iced buckets of shrimp, scallops and chunked rockfish at one; brats, Italian sausages and Kielbasa at another, and grilled veggies like green onions, eggplant slices, red and green peppers and Vidalia onions, all brushed with bottled Italian dressing, at the other grills. Invite your guests or, better yet, flamboyant relatives and friends to get the grilling going.

Last, but not least, the best planners always remember that, yes, this is a party and all the guests are hoping they will enjoy it. Good party planners will be well prepared, thus allowing the host and/or hostess also to have fun and enjoy the guests.

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Peter Winiaky and Rita Tsdale, both West Bloomfield High School students, stop in together every day for a Slimmery soft-serve frozen dessert at the American Bulk Food Store in the West Bloomfield Plaza. (Below) Phyllis Applebaum of West Bloomfield shops while having Slimmery in a chocolate/vanilla twist.

DALE AN
staff photographer

By Anne R. Lehmann
special writer

OPEN THE DOOR to one of the five area American Bulk Food Stores and you are treated to what one might call a sensory carnival.

Surrounding you are the smell of spices, the visual display of colorful candies in lucite bins and the sound of coffee being freshly ground.

With a fast-growing clientele, American Bulk Food is establishing a reputation as a testing ground for new products including a wide variety of hard-to-find low-calorie and kosher products.

The stores are owned and operated by Marty Benson, a former pharmacist who listened when his wife suggested he open bulk candy sections in his two Wyandotte pharmacies 11 years ago.

Without intending to, they were test marketing a concept that was so successful he sold his pharmacies and started a chain of bulk-food-concept stores.

BESIDES MARKETING unusual products, Benson, the son of a former ice cream manufacturer, enjoyed innovating his own food creations. Consequently, Slimmery, a patented soft-serve frozen dessert, was born.

Available in such flavors as double dutch fudge, peanut butter cup and raspberry royale, this swirled confection adds up to nine calories per ounce and conforms to many diet plans.

ALTHOUGH SLIMMERY is now fat and sugar free, it wasn't always that way.

"When we started out, we were sugar free. When everyone started asking for fat-free ice cream, we changed the recipe. The point is we always try to accommodate the tastes and demands of our customers," Benson said.

Besides cups of Slimmery, there are variations on the theme including Slimmery pies, mousse, apple strudel and chocolate cake brownies — none of them weighing in for more than 179 calories.

Four ounces of Slimmery, which Benson admits is made up mostly of air, costs \$1.29.

Custom-designed ice cream machines and pure Nutrasweet make the item expensive to produce.

Slimmery is the word for dessert



"The pure form of Nutrasweet costs \$200 a pound."

ALTHOUGH THE soft-serve frozen dessert makes up a good part of the business, Benson is always branching out.

In recent years he has added a line of 150-calorie muffins and baked goods including 40-calorie fruit bars. Benson developed these recipes and sells the muffin mix in bulk form for \$1.99 a pound.

"People can buy the mix and make the muffins at home for so much less money, yet they prefer to buy them from our bakery case." Benson also collaborates with candy manufacturing companies to develop improved varieties of old favorites, including double dipped chocolate raisins and peanuts.

STILL, THE mainstay of Benson's business comes from the items that fill the bins throughout the store.

"Buying bulk makes sense for so many reasons. We eliminate obvious costs for packaging, distribution and advertising and the savings are passed on to the consumer."

Freshness is another factor that makes buying in bulk sensible. Prepackaged items often wait in warehouses to be shipped. When purchasing in bulk, one buys products in their freshest form, Benson said.

This is especially true of spices, which are more robust when they are fresher. Additionally, spices, a very important ingredient for some recipes, are costly.

Instead of having to commit to a container of a condiment for something that might be used once or twice, buying bulk allows a person to buy quantities by the ounce.

WITH THE beginning of warmer weather, patrons stopping in for bulk items are walking away with a Slimmery frozen dessert.

Though it may look dangerously fattening, the calorie content makes it an indulgence most dieters can afford.

"My wife," Benson said, laughing, "calls it a grand illusion."

American Bulk Food Stores owned and operated by Marty Benson are in West Bloomfield, Rochester, Dearborn, Ann Arbor and Southgate.

Fitness buffs keep in best of shape enjoying meals at World Gym Cafe

Pasta salad and fruit salad are two of the dishes chef Tom Alonzo offers at the cafe in Canton.



By Arlene Funke
special writer

Eating healthy doesn't have to mean a steady diet of carrot sticks and mung sprouts.

Tom Alonzo, chef of the new World Gym Cafe in Canton, is determined to cut fat and eliminate high sodium without sacrificing taste. "Our theme is food for fitness," said Alonzo, 26, of Westland. "I try to get plenty different spices, to take the place of salt."

The restaurant, which opened last month, sells sandwiches, salads and hot dishes packed in carry-out containers. Packages are labeled with information about sodium, fat, cholesterol and calories.

For example, Alonzo tops a large baked potato with a medley of chopped, cooked tomatoes, zucchini, onions and mushrooms seasoned with basil and thyme. The vegetables are crowned with melted, part-skim mozzarella cheese.

HE BLOKS chicken pieces to obtain stock for black bean soup, avoiding salty commercial base.

Alonzo's smoked turkey pita sandwich is garnished with a dollop of spicy mustard and cholesterol-free mayonnaise.

The restaurant is nestled in a storefront which is part of the World Gym aerobics and fitness center at Warren and Lilley roads. The gym and restaurant are owned by Tom Kosh, 41, of Farmington Hills.

Alonzo's stated goal is to provide a healthy alternative to the burger-and-fries meal. "Once people try this food, I think they are going to take a complete look," said Alonzo, a 1985 graduate of Plymouth-Canton High School.

For example, the veggie baked potato contains 20 grams of protein, 12 grams of fat, 74 grams of carbohydrate and 571 milligrams of sodium. It has 461 calories. The vegetable pita, at 237 calories, has 9 grams of protein, 42 grams of carbohydrate, 4 grams of fat and 126 milligrams of sodium.

Alonzo became interested in cooking during high school. He studied culinary arts at Johnson and Wales University in Providence, R.I., and hotel and restaurant management at Eastern Michigan University.

THE CHIEF, who has worked at several local restaurants, is fulfilling requirements toward becoming certified as an executive

chef. He also teaches culinary arts at the William D. Ford Vocational/Technical Center in Westland.

Substituting spices for salt and creating low-fat sauces is second nature to Alonzo, a fitness buff. "I have been doing it at home for myself for a number of years," he said.

The World Gym Cafe, geared to carry-out trade, has only a few take-out items. Low-fat frozen yogurt was sold there. Yogurt still is on the menu. But the repertoire now includes interesting salads, sandwiches and dishes such as vegetable lasagna and pasta with broccoli and mushrooms.

Prices are reasonable. The veggie baked potato costs \$1.85. Sandwiches are in the \$3 range. Salads range from around \$1.50 to \$3.50 for a pasta-and-cheese blend. Hot entrees cost around \$4.

Owner Kosh intends to concentrate on establishing his customer base during the next two years, then moving his entire operation to a larger site within a mile or two.

World Gym Cafe is in the World Gym complex at Lilley and Warren roads, Canton, phone 455-7560. Hours are 8 a.m. to 10:30 p.m. Monday-Friday, 9 a.m. to 8:30 p.m. Saturday, and 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Sunday.