

Connoisseur from page 2B

owning his own restaurant came true when Zilko and Gikas made him a partner in the carry-out restaurant which showcases the American Connoisseur product line. The West Bloomfield restaurant at 4301 Orchard Lake Road in the Crosswinds Mall features salads, gourmet marinated hamburgers, char-broiled and rotisserie chicken. Eventually the partners hope to offer franchises.

"American Connoisseur is the only restaurant I know of to be designed around an existing line of gourmet food products," said Zilko.

The story of American Connoisseur begins in January 1992 when the company was started by Birmingham-based commercial real estate brokers Peter Gikas, an attorney, and Dave Zilko, who has a master of business administration degree in marketing.

"We studied the gourmet food market and looked for niches where products weren't available," said Zilko. "We both like to

cook, but had no food industry background. We wanted to make something that tasted great with powerful flavor, and didn't compromise on ingredients."

"We wanted to make it very tasty, and high quality. We found a niche for ourselves," adds Gikas.

They spent four months in their respective kitchens in Birmingham and Bloomfield Hills in the fall of 1991 developing their gourmet marinades. "We'd get together four to six nights a week," said Zilko. "We mixed the products up ourselves."

Six months after they were introduced, these marinades, now manufactured at a commissary in Sylvan Lake, were featured in Bloomfield's, Marshall Field's, Macy's, Hudson's, Jacobson's, Woodward and Lothrop, Wanamaker's and Kaufmann's.

Last spring, American Connoisseur became one of the few food companies to be featured on the upscale home shopping network, QVC which is shown nationally in

54 million homes. On their first appearance, they sold over \$16,000 worth of product in 45 seconds. Since then they've been appearing on the show on a regular basis. They are also on the Prodigy computer network and will soon be on CompuServe.

American Connoisseur now offers three chicken marinades — Dijon, Honey Mustard, and Garlic and Herb. There is a hamburger marinade — Classic Burger Marinade with Marcella Wine, and three cooking oils — basil, garlic and oregano.

They also offer two salad dressings — Creamy Greek, Balsamic Italian, three vinaigrettes — peach, raspberry and strawberry, four dessert toppings — honey, peach, raspberry and strawberry, and plans to launch a candy division in April.

"The gourmet chicken marinades are all natural and canola oil-based," said Zilko. "Canola oil is 94 percent saturated fat free the highest percentages of any oil. The marinades are designed to be

used with boneless, skinless chicken breasts. The honey mustard marinade is one third pure honey, canola oil, vinegar and mustard."

American Connoisseur products are also available at Major's and some Kroger stores in Oakland County. Prices for the gourmet marinades range from \$3.99 to \$7.50. The gourmet vinaigrettes range from \$3.69 to \$4.95 and the flavored cooking oils from \$3.99 to \$7.50. The dessert toppings range from \$4.50 to \$4.95.

Editor's note: Specialty food sampler is an occasional feature that introduces the people behind some of the made in Michigan products you purchase at the grocery store. To recommend a business to be featured, call 313-953-2105, or write Keely Wygonik, Taste/Entertainment Editor, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, Inc., 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150.

See recipes inside.

Chef Janes answers more reader questions

See Larry Janes' Taste Buds column on Taste front.

Readers who enjoy cruising the open waters and enjoying great food will appreciate a berth through the land of the midnight sun when Executive Chef de Cuisine Peter Loren of Detroit's 1953 "Restaurant of the Year" Opti One sets sail with the Royal Viking Line on a 16 day trip.

Chef Loren will prepare two special dinners and will be your host for folks on board from metro Detroit. For more information, contact Carson Travel at 313-885-3100.

Arnie Metras of Troy called to say that he loves anchovies, especially in a Caesar Salad but always has leftovers.

You can keep them in a covered container for up to 1 month in their oil, or you can make this recipe that is absolutely wonderful when brushed over fish before, during and after cooking.

ANCHOVY BUTTER

2 sticks butter or margarine, cut into pieces  
2 tablespoons lemon juice  
1/2 teaspoon fresh ground black pepper  
1 (2 ounce) can anchovies, drained

Using a food processor or a blender, add all the ingredients and process until smooth. Will keep tightly covered in the refrigerator for up to 1 week. Makes 1 1/4 cups.

Carla Smiley of Rochester was

looking for an easy recipe for pretzels that she can make with her two kids, Kara, 6 and Kevin, 8.

This a recipe for a soft and chewy pretzel that can be twisted into a traditional shape or simply baked in circles or sticks for great eating.

SOFT PRETZELS

1 cup warm water (105-115 degrees F.)  
1 package active dry yeast  
About 3 cups sifted all purpose flour, divided  
2 tablespoons soft butter or margarine  
1/2 teaspoon salt  
1 egg (optional)  
Combine in a mixer bowl the warm water and the yeast. When dissolved, add and beat 1 1/2 cups flour, butter, salt and sugar. Mix for three minutes.

Pour onto a board and knead in remaining flour in small quantities just until the dough loses its stickiness. Allow to rise in a covered bowl until doubled in bulk, about 1 1/2 hours. Punch down and divide into 12 pieces for pretzels or 36 strips for sticks.

With the palms of your hands, roll into lengths about the thickness of a pencil. Twist and shape, if desired into pretzels.

Preheat oven to 475 degrees. Brush with a beaten egg and sprinkle with coarse salt, if desired. Bake until golden brown and crispy, about 12 minutes for pretzels and about 8 minutes for the sticks.

Gourmet marinades make dinner easy

See related story on Taste front. Here are some recipes featuring American Connoisseur marinades.

CRUNCHY CHICKEN GARDEN SALAD

American Connoisseur Gourmet Garlic and Herb Marinade  
4 boneless, skinless chicken breasts  
1 head lettuce — your choice of iceberg, romaine, spinach  
1 cucumber, sliced  
2 tomatoes, quartered  
1 medium red onion, chopped  
Optional ingredients  
Cheese — your choice of Parmesan, Muenster, Cheddar or Feta

Sunflower seeds  
Nuts — your choice of almonds, walnuts, pecans or peanuts

Marinate chicken breasts in garlic and herb marinade in refrigerator overnight, or at least one hour before cooking, turning chicken once. Grill or broil chicken and cut into strips.

Toss with lettuce, vegetables and optional ingredients. Serves 4 to 6.

HONEY MUSTARD BAKED CHICKEN

1 fryer chicken, (3 to 4 pounds) cut up  
American Connoisseur Gourmet Honey Mustard Marinade  
At least 1 hour before baking.

rinse chicken pieces, pat dry and place in a shallow baking dish. Pour enough marinade into baking dish to cover chicken half-way up. Refrigerate 1 hour, turning once.

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. Cover baking dish and bake chicken 1 hour, or until tender. Baste chicken 2-3 times during baking.

Before serving, pour American Connoisseur Gourmet Honey Mustard marinade over chicken. Also use as a table sauce. Serves 4-6.

SHRIMP STIR-FRY

1/2 cup American Connoisseur Gourmet Classic Burger Marinade  
1 pound shrimp, peeled and deveined  
2 teaspoons cooking oil

2 cloves minced garlic  
1 medium onion, sliced  
2 teaspoons sesame seeds  
1 cup chopped zucchini  
1/2 cup green or red pepper, chopped  
1/2 cup water chestnuts, sliced  
1 (6 ounce) package frozen Chinese pea pods, thawed  
1/2 cup bean sprouts  
Rice

Marinate shrimp in American Connoisseur Gourmet Classic Burger Marinade.

Heat cooking oil in a skillet or wok on medium-high heat. Add garlic, onion and sesame seeds. Cook until onion is translucent. Add zucchini, pepper and water chestnuts. Saute 4 or 5 minutes.

Add marinated shrimp and cook 4-6 minutes. Just before serving, add bean sprouts and pea pods. Heat thoroughly. Serve stir-fry over rice. Serves 4.

Fight fat from page 1B

ceries. Good Food Company also has a small restaurant, that has an "amazing selection of prepared foods including soups, salads and entrees."

A few grocery items she regularly buys are non-fat fruit and fig bars, non-fat cereals such as Oats, and Alto Dena, a non-fat European style yogurt. She also states convenience as being another plus of the Good Food Company. She can pick up groceries, vitamins and water in one store and have a great meal at the restaurant at the same time. This is a big plus for people who do not

like to cook, eat out frequently, or do not like to cook for one person.

Hay asked for a "make over" of her spinach pie recipe. She was shocked to discover 46.4 grams of fat per serving were in the original recipe. By using a non-stick baking dish and cooking oil spray instead of butter, the total fat was reduced by 170 grams. We eliminated the butter and cut 1,530 calories. Also, this recipe is best when made a day ahead. The cheese and spinach flavors blend together nicely.

Also, note that no cooking spray was used between the bot-

tom layers of phyllo dough. The moisture from the spinach mixture provides the liquid needed to cook the dough.

I suggest making two pies at a time, baking one, and freezing one for future use. This recipe is wonderful to serve to guests. It is a very satisfying meal when served with a large garden salad.

For a complimentary issue of the "Laura's Fat Free Kitchen" newsletter, send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to H.W. Publications, P.O. Box 9324, Livonia 48151-1324. Subscription price is \$12 a year.

COOKING CALENDAR

To get your classes or events listed in this column, send items to be considered for publication to: Keely Wygonik, Taste Editor, The Observer & Eccentric, 36251 Schoolcraft Road, Livonia 48150. Or fax to 591-7279.

■ FOR KIDS  
Half plants in the kitchen, a cooking class for little chefs ages 8-12 will be offered at the YMCA, 248 Union Street, Plymouth, 930-11 a.m. Saturdays beginning Feb. 26 through April 12. Cost is \$25 for YMCA members, \$35 for non-members. Another class will be offered April 16-May 21. Call, 463-2904 to register.

■ HANDS ON ENTREES  
Offered at the Community Center of Farmington, Farmington Hills 10 a.m. to noon Thursday, March 10. Emphasizes cooking for one or two, bring apron, dinner plate and place settings. Cost \$15, plus \$4 materials fee. Call 477-8404 to register.

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