

## DINING

## Joe Muer's keeps seafood concept while reinventing itself

By ELEANOR HEALD  
SPECIAL WRITER

Detroit restaurateur Joe Muer lent his name to a Southfield eatery in 1994.

The art deco bar and grill never really caught on.

That's history.

In late summer 1997, veteran former employees of Joe Muer's seafood house in Detroit, Geoffrey Browning and Chick Taylor, purchased the restaurant. Today, with general manager Greg Nowowicki, also a long-time downtown Joe Muer's employee, and talented executive chef Joe Shafer, on board since last November, Joe Muer's Grill has reinvented itself.

After purchasing it, Browning and Taylor closed Joe Muer's Grill for remodeling. Their personal design is club-like with lots of medium-dark stained oak and a variety of seating options in booths, tables of four, and larger circular seating with comfortable banquettes. Walls accented in red create a warm comfortable feeling. In the booths, lighting accents the tables and food, while diners remain soothed in the shadows.

You'll feel comfortable here in pressed blue jeans and shirt or a business suit.

The most significant change in remodeling was the incorporation of a large bar area which has become a meeting place. Also on display is a large model of the Bob-o boat Columbia. Browning's family operated the boats from 1949 to 1979. The lower level, housing rest rooms, also has photographs from this period in Detroit's history.

If you're anguished at the jammed up noise level in other restaurants, Joe Muer's Grill has sound breaks in the floor design to make table conversation possible.

Last January, a model of the logo's fish was crafted by long-time patron John Kreiger of Detroit. It hangs at the entrance signaling that Joe Muer's is principally about seafood.

"We're the natural heirs to what people remember about Joe Muer's downtown, but we've improved the concept," Browning responded to my question about decision to retain the name. And this has been done well.

## Joe Muer's Grill

Where: 30855 Southfield Road, Southfield (248) 644-5330.

Hours: Monday-Thursday lunch 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., dinner 4-10 p.m.; Friday until 11 p.m.; Saturday dinner only 5-11 p.m.

Menu: Seafood emphasis, but also a savvy selection of chop-house specialties including chicken. All served with vegetable and choice of rice or potatoes.

Cost: Lunch seafood dishes \$9-\$14. Dinner with double the number of choices

\$17-45. For kid's under 12, six-item menu \$6-\$13.

Reservations: Recommended.

Credit cards: All majors.

Browning and Taylor have retained the essence of Joe Muer's signature dishes and taken them to new heights with more attractive, upbeat plating. Are cottage cheese and marinated beans your "amuse bouche" at dinner? Yes. Side accompaniments of creamed spinach and stewed tomatoes are also available for those who remember these downtown staples.

"Some diners expect that this 140-seat location can do everything the 440-seat downtown restaurant did," Browning remarked. "That's impossible."

It's probably good that it is. It allowed reinvention and fueled a vision for the future. In the kitchen department, this is being done by 34-year-old executive chef Joe Shafer, a Schoolcraft College culinary grad.

Shafer trained under the best: Master Chef Miles Cihelka and Steve Allen at the Golden Mushroom. He worked with Allen to open Steve and Rocky's in Novi.

Now, as sole top togeth Shafer has added signature dishes to both the lunch and dinner menus, such as the House Salad, composed of toasted pecans, red onions, apples, spring mix, crumbled blue cheese with apple cider and balsamic vinaigrette. Rock Shrimp Risotto with asparagus, scallions, tomatoes, roasted red peppers, parmesan cheese and shrimp sauce is another Shafer signature and an example of the new-age seafood touch.

But in the "it's not broken, don't fix it" category are Joe Muer classics such as Shrimp Ilene and Devil Crab Balls as appetizers. Among fresh seafood items, Canadian Lake Perch is number one, followed by Atlantic

Halibut and Seared Atlantic Salmon with caramelized capers and fried parsley butter. There aren't many fish houses serving Steamed Finnan Haddock or five soft-shelled crabs at dinner for \$22.75, or one-of-a-kind Whole Dover Sole.

No other restaurant has R.C. Potatoes either.

Here's their story. Joe Muer's downtown used to serve boiled potatoes as a side. There were daily leftovers. Not to be wasteful, they were cubed, deep-fried and served the next day as R-Cooked. That's one version of R.C. The other is that a speech-challenged employee, fond of the potatoes yet unable to say he liked them really crisp, just called them R.C.

They are re-cooked and one of the best leftovers ever. They're also really crispy!

A well-constructed wine list includes such star newcomers as La Joya and Justin as well as top-ranked imports. A proprietor's fun Bordeaux select list is available on request. You can buy a bottle of some of the listings at auction for the price on this list.

Whether or not you know the legend of Joe Muer's in Detroit, you'll enjoy what the "downtown legends" owners are doing in Southfield. Joe Muer's Grill is about the freshest seafood, served in a comfortable atmosphere, wood-top tables at lunch and dressed up with white table cloth at dinner.

Read between the lines of the modest Joe Muer's Grill sign on Southfield, just south of 13 Mile Road. It says "Come on in and get to know us. We've reinvented ourselves."



STAFF PHOTO BY JIM JACKSON

## Toast to

tradition: Geoffrey Browning is one of the owners of Joe Muer's Grill. A veteran former employee of Joe Muer's seafood house in Detroit, Browning, along with his partner Chick Taylor, offer some of what people remember about Joe Muer's downtown with some pleasant surprises.

## WHAT'S COOKING

Send items for consideration in What's Cooking to Kelly Wyzgonik, Entertainment Editor, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, Inc., 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150, fax (248) 691-7279, or e-mail kwygonik@cc.honcom.com.net

**LE GALA DE CUISINE**  
Event 3:30 p.m. Sunday, May 23 at Cranbrook Schools showcases 40 chefs from metro Detroit restaurants. The event will feature a silent auction, appearance by jazz saxophonist George Benson, and continuous entertainment by Cranbrook Kingswood music ensembles. In addition to having the opportunity to sample appetizers, entrees, desserts, coffees and fine wines, guests will receive a one-of-a-kind

cookbook with recipes from participating chefs. Tickets \$125 (friends, \$150 (patron) and \$200 (benefactor), call (248) 663-6099. Cranbrook Schools are at 550 Lane Pine Road.

## TOO CHEZ

In honor of the National Hockey League and the Stanley Cup Champion Red Wings, Too Chez restaurant, 27155 Sheraton Dr. (intersection corner of North Road and I-96) will offer free hors d'oeuvres of "Red Hot Wings" and a Special Octopus Appetizer each time the Red Wings play in the NHL Playoffs. This special promotion will be offered from the start to the finish of each game every time the Red Wings play, concluding with when the

Wings again bring home the Stanley Cup. For more information and reservations, call (248) 348-5555.

## PINK STREET

Is celebrating its 15th anniversary. Local saxophonist/composer and producer Larry Notaro performs with pianist Cliff Moncar 7-11 p.m. Friday, May 14, 21 and 28. Pink Street is 18 W. Pike St. in Pontiac, call (248) 334-7878 for information.

**PINOT NOIR EXTRAVAGANZA**  
All Pinot Feast, 6:30 p.m. Friday, May 14 at Morels, A Michigan Bistro, 30100 Telegraph, Bingham Farms. The cost is \$98 per person, plus tax and gratuity. Call (248) 642-1094 (Ext. 3) for reservations.

**NM CAFE AT NEIMAN MARCUS**  
Dinner featuring Andreotti Wines and guest Joe Antonini, 6:30 p.m. (reservation) 7 p.m. (dinner) Friday, May 14, NM Cafe at Neiman Marcus, Level Three.

Somerset Collection, 2705 W. Big Beaver Road, Troy. The cost is \$65 per person, \$120 per couple. Call (248) 643-3300, Ext. 2470 for reservations/information.

## THE LARK

Italian dinner, 7 p.m. Monday

or Tuesday, May 24 or 23, 6430 Farmington Road, West Bloomfield. The cost is \$95 per person, not including beverages, tax and gratuity. Call (248) 661-4466.

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