Unique career suits Prentice fine

BY ELEANOR HEALD SPECIAL WRITER

att Prentice, president and CEO of the Unique Restaurant Corporation, can't believe he's been in the restaurant business for 20 years. His story is as inspirational as the food served at his dozen eateries which are strategically located around metro-Detroit.

Prentice, who has been cooking since he was 12, went to the Culinary Institute of America in New York. At 19, he returned home to Royal Oak with an apportunity to complete an externable program that also would pay for a second year of ohes education. His employer, a deli owner, challenged him to turn around one of his struggling restaurants in Oak Park, which Prentice did.

Needing a greater culinary

Prentice did.

Needing a greater cullinary challenge, Prentice was about to accept a restaurant sous cheffs position when the deli owner decided to sell. Prentice tapped his cullinary education savings and bought the deli.

Using his least \$200 as cash register till, he opened Deli Unique in 1980, serving Beef Wellington and flaming duck at deli prices.

Definitely unique

In his first year of operation, Prentice employed 15 people and served 50,000 customers. Today, he employs more than 1,000 and serves more than 4 million annu-

ally.

Confident that he could expand, he opened Cafe Jardin in the main promenade of Somerset Collection South in 1984. Future successes and industry accolades foliowed. Today. Prentice is one of Michigan's key taste makers and Unique Restaurant Corporation one of the state's largest cateerers.

Beginning with his first

Beginning with his first eatery, Prentice found ways to turn sow's ears into silk purses. Ten of his restaurants are on sites of failed cateries.

In addition to a 16-hour per day work ethic, imitated by all

■ Duet, 3663 Woodward, Detroit, (313) 831-3838. Urban pscale theme and continental cuisine bring the word "creative" to

upscale theme and continental cuisine bring the word "creative" to new levels.

Morels, A Michigan Biatro, 30100 Telegraph Road (248) 642-1094. A very Michigan food focus is enhanced by a beautiful atrium garden that changes with the seasons.

No. Vi Chop House and Lobster Bar, 27790 Novi Road (in Hotel Beronette), Novi (248) 305-5210. Upscale prime steakhouse with lobster as the principal seafood focus set in an atmosphere reminiscent of a 1920s Havana hotel.

Northern Lakes Seafood, 1475 North Woodward (in Kingsley Hotel & Sultes), Bloomfield Hills (248) 646-7900. In a modern, casually-elegant dining atmosphere, surfers enjoy the freshest of seafoods and turfers can order Certified Angus Beef.

■ Friends and ramily fun
■ Flying Fish, 17600 W. 13 Mile Road, Beverly Hills (248) 6477747. Casual neighborhood family eatery serves comfort foods
with special focus on fresh catches of the day.
■ Portabella, 2745 W. Big Beaver Road (Somerset Collection
South), Troy (248) 649-6625. Italian with creative diversions such
as dishes playing on the portabella mushroom theme.

■ Casual and guick

■ Casual and quick
■ Casual and quick
■ Cafe Jardin, 2815 W. Big Beaver Road (Somerset Collection South), Troy (248) 649-1348. Don't shop till you drop. This is a greet place to people watch and grab a bite.
■ Dell Unique, 1475 N. Woodward Avenue (in Kingsley Hotel & Sultes), Bloomfield Hills (248) 645-7923; 30100 Telegraph, Bingham Farms (248) 645-5288; 6724 Orchard Lake, West Bloomfield (248) 737-3890; and 3663 Woodward, Detroit (313) 833-8810. Eye-opening breakfasts or for lunch and early dinner, there are soups, salads, sandwiches and bürgers with an array of side dishes.
■ Plaze Deli, 29145 Northwestern Highway, Southfield (248) 356-2310. Deli delights that don't disappoint.

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■ Matt Prentice's forecasting savvy has never let his restaurants

who work for him at the highest levels, Prentice has an uncanny ability to forecast restaurant trends. Add on an exceptional palate and unwavering attention to details and you know his for-mula for success.

Perking up palates with stylized wine selections is the interna-tionally renowned Master Som-melier Madeline Triffon, who serves as Unique Restaurant Corporation's Beverage Director.

A number of her proteges have advanced to certified sommeliers and are continually encouraged by Trifion to rise to the ranks of Master Sommelier through continued study and by passing difficult examinations.

Highly anticipated

righty anticipated
Prentice says he will open the
highly anticipated Milk & Honey
in the Jewish Community Center, West Bloomfield, by the end
of 2001. Operating as a full-service Cholov Israel dairy restaurant, the menu will specialize in
Asian, vogetarian dishes and
fish.

fish.

"Because of kosher restrictions, Milk & Honey will be cultinarily pristine," Prentice said.
"Meat-like textures will be achieved with soy and mushrooms. Sauces made with roasted vegetables will be as rich as
those made from meats.
"Vegetarians will be pleased.

"Vegetarians will be pleased with the offerings."

Eleanor Heald is a Troy resident who writes about dining, food, wine and spirits for the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers. To leave her a voice mail message, dial (734) 953-2047 on a touch-tone phone, mailbox 1864#.



Lunchtime: Matt Prentice makes sandwiches in a hurry to keep up with the lunch rush at Plaza Deli.

become stale.

mula for success.
Until 1998 Prentice had located all his eateries in the suburbs. When he opened Duet in Detroit's Orchestra Place in June of that year, he said, "People driving the Orchestra Hall

projects are the brightest real estate minds in Detroit. The whole development is \$80 million. There's a lot of smart money coming into Detroit today. If Duet executes, we'll have as good a food as any other fine dining in Detroit." Forecast now realized. Staving on top

Prentice's forecasting savvy has naver let his restaurants become stale. He's willing to move on, not so much pushed by food trends, but by a chance to offer his dining patrons something new and fresh.

Such taste making is not cooked up alone. Prentice has

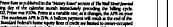


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