DINING OUT

TasteFest

Annual event offers food, entertainment and shopping

BY CINDI COOK SPECIAL WRITER

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No, it's not your cousin's wedding, it's the TasteFest!

The culinary showcase for area restaurants is in it's 14th year—hard to believe for something that started out as a way to keep employees well-fed.

Two decades ago, a good idea came out of the minds of some enterprising Detroiters. The New Center Council set up a program to be the caretaker for the neighborhood, now familiar to many as the, well, New Center Area. The idea was to pick up the litter, do the requisite marketing, and a newsletter—all in the hopes that the area around the Fisher Building would bounce back. The once glorious 'hood had potential, and these dotermined folks were not about to see it fall by the wayside. And in order to feed those determined New Center Council folks involved in the rejuvenation and renovation, local fare was gathered and set out for their eating enjoyment. And the TasteFest was born.

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Encompassing approximately 40 food venders—enteries, restaurants and shops, it has evolved into what Detroiters now know as the most delicious event around, a massive regional draw for the culinar-ily inclined, or those who just like to snack.

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Two only been here five years, but to me it's evolved into a more interesting event," says Michael Solaka, President of New Center Council, the non-profit business organization that is responsible for the whole enchilada. We've added an art gallery to the fest and the 2nd Avenue Marketplace—the kind of retailers who might someday be in the city."

Solaka obviously has had good feedback on the event—and a good freedback on the event—and a good time feeding people. The crowd now pulls participants to both sides of the counter from all counties of the Metro area and beyond.

"The TasteFest to me has to reflect what we do," he says. "We're not trying to be the biggest and best festival — there are lots of cool festivals around, like Arts Beats and Eats in Pontiac. We want to be about diversity and harmony too but also about creative energy, to invite new youthful energy into this neighborhood."

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His invitations seemed to have worked. Zoup!, the four year old quick casual soup plenomenon is making its first appearance this year. Owner Eric Ersher is excited about the event: This year we wanted to participate so we're ready to roll."
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After about a year of planning and development, he and his two partners opened their first store in September of 1998. They now have four locations-in Southfield, Troy, Detroit, and Novi. They will be opening on Hall Road between Shayner and Hayes in Shelby Township this fail.

The Zougl concept (according to Ersher) in a nutshell: "We have 200 soups, we serve 12 A day, they rotate daily, and each order is

DTE Energy

served with a big hunk of bread."

Who will be eating hot soup in the middle of July? Plenty of people, he predicts. Featured front and eenter will be their most popular concections: Chicken Pat Pie, a creamy chicken and vegetable soup topped with a homemade pie crust (the epitome of comfort food that would make anyone turn down a snow cone in a heartbeat). Shrimp and Crawfish Etouffee, and Spicy Black Bean Chili, the vegetatian choice, which is also dairy free.

His enthusiasm for the Taste-Fest and all it holds is on the tip of his tongue. "It's important toget the word out and expose people to the quality of Zoupi soups! It sounds like a great event!" No category of cuisine is missing from the Taste-Fest, that's for sure. Mesquito Creck in Clarkstan and Novi, is returning this year with their high quality offerings. "We're doing a booth-we've done it two years previously," says Beth Hussey, Mesquite Creck's general manager. "In years past its been great for us." The seafood and steakhouse uses a slight The seafood and steakhouse uses a slight The seafood and steakhouse swel as not be not and cheese taco. "We wanted to pick a couple "We wanted to pick a couple

items that represent the restaurant well. Everything well make at the TastGreat will be grilled right over mesquite. Mesquite, Hussey explains to this native reporter, is a type of tree that only grows in Teans. As apposed to others who use the charcoal derivation, Mesquite Creek uses the real wood with which to cook. Their beautiful restaurants are known throughout the area, with the Novi location being exceptional: A real actual Mesquite tree is planted in the center. The comfy casual atmosphere helps people to feel right at home. Says Hussey, They know us for our great food, large portions, and great prices. She too feels the TasteFest experience will only make it better. We'd like to expand; it's a great concept, Hussey aws.

If you aren't hungry, don't have a cow: TastGreat entertainment is the kind that only Motown (and its creative citizenry) can deliver—and it's free, as well as most other acts. Appearing on the mais tage are the likes of The Ramsay Lewis Trie and WAR; Dr. John also makes an appearance, and that icon of the Sos, Joan Jett and the Blackhearts will grace the crowd with her rockin presence.

As if that weren't enough, a



Strolling diners: Patrons at last year's Comerica Taste Fest sample cuisine from booths stationed in Detroit's New Center area.

THE FUNNIEST FILM OF THE SUMMER"

Names like Bliss 66 and American Mars, familiar to those who follow the local music scene, will appear

will be 11 kinds of specialty shops in the market – The 2nd Avenue Street Marketplace, that is.

a the four stages.

Aside from music and food, there right recipe for a good time for all.







