

## SHOWCASE

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"One of our cooks, who's doing great here, is a student there," said Casey Pullen, Carver's general manager. "We like to be part of the community, that's why we've been involved in this in the past."

Chef Rich Hallberg of Emily's in Northville hasn't announced what he will offer — it will be a surprise. In the past, the French inspired Mediterranean eatery has served items like seared scallops.

Emily's currently employs at least one Schoolcraft Culinary graduate.

"We like to get involved in education," Hallberg said. "Schoolcraft has a great department."

Randy Emert, the chef of

Great Oaks Country Club in Rochester, will offer Oriental style braised beef short ribs with a vegetable stir fry and crispy noodles.

Lee Camona of Sodebo in Detroit is creating Asian Latin Fusion cuisine with grilled corn pancakes topped with Moosha Dinoks, or Asian Vegetables.

Vine 2 Custom Winery, in Northville, will offer wine samples. Black Star Farms of Suttons Bay will pour sips of award-winning fruit and dessert wines. Eight to 10 wineries are expected to participate in the event.

Among the 50 participating restaurants are Sweet Lorraine's Cafe of Southfield and Livonia, Tom's Oyster Bar of Southfield, Royal Oak, and Grosse Pointe, and The Loving Spoonful in Farmington Hills.

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## EPOCH

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its success partially through a tooling company, Progressive Tool and Industries, that was sold several years ago.

Today, Sabina, who studied hotel restaurant and hospitality management in Michigan and Florida, spends her time traveling between all the restaurants and catering facility. Her success is widely known in Michigan and she's becoming a local celebrity. Her lavish and much-anticipated wedding last year to engineer Steve Sabina included 350 guests, with some arriving on private planes.

The wedding was noteworthy for its never-ending meals, 24-piece orchestra, steel drum band, and cherry tree decor. In tune with her personality though, the dress code was comfortable, and anything but snooty. And that's the philosophy Sabina holds at her restaurants. At Tribute, guests aren't required to dress lavishly to enjoy an upscale meal.

### 'IT'S ABOUT FUN'

Merriment, quality meals and an interesting atmosphere are tools used to fill restaurant tables, Sabina said. Even at the prestigious Tribute, named one of the 50 Best Restaurants in America by *Gourmet* Magazine, the focus is on quality food and gaiety.

"The customers are entertainment," she said. "I want mine to be fun and not stuffy. I want everyone to feel comfortable at Tribute. Sometimes people are

Sabina's values of friendliness and visually stunning restaurants were strengthened after Sept. 11. To help its victims, Tribute hosted a \$1,000 a plate fund-raiser. After the attacks, Epoch business suffered initially as people chose to cocoon.

intimidated at five-star restaurants. Everyone deserves to feel good during their dining experience."

For example, guests are greeted warmly upon entering Tribute with a boisterous welcome bellowed by Maitre d' Mickey Bakst:

"Hello Everybody! Sabina's values of friendliness and visually stunning restaurants were strengthened after Sept. 11. To help its victims, Tribute hosted a \$1,000 a plate fund-raiser. After the attacks, Epoch business suffered initially as people chose to cocoon."

Tribute experienced losses in the first quarter of 2002 as businesses cut dining and entertainment budgets. Within months though, people began to go out again and sought friendly places where they could feel good. Businesses regained some confidence and corporate dining gained some momentum.

The Bay Harbor restaurants near Potoskey are enjoying an extremely good year which Sabina attributes to more in-state vacations over airline trips.

Sabina turns talk of herself into accolades for her staff's talents. Compliments for Tribute

Chef Takashi Yagihashi; praises for Too Chee Head Chef Michael Schmidt and cheerful dining room manager Achille Bianchi; words of gratitude for Forte Executive Chef Timothy Voss.

She also takes a moment to praise Schoolcraft College's Culinary Arts program because many Epoch employees started there, she said. Sabina is the honorary chair of this year's Schoolcraft Culinary Extravaganza on Sunday, Sept. 22. (See related story)

The event will be a good one to see what's new in the food world, she said.

### INDUSTRY TRENDS

It's Sabina's job to follow restaurant trends. Today, many establishments are afraid to have a unique identity. People want comfort, she said, explaining the growing popularity of huge chain restaurants that use identical menus throughout the country.

"Family-oriented restaurants are very popular," Sabina said. Most restaurants today are kid-friendly with casual attire.

She also notices the rising popularity of Asian and Pacific Rim cuisine, especially sushi.

While Sabina and her staff need to watch trends to keep menus fresh, each restaurant has its own identity and style. For example, Too Chee Bistro is eclectic and Tribute is Japanese/French.

A salad at Too Chee includes hearts of palm, spinach, capers and Parmesan cheese. Crab cake, lentil, and herb patties are some of the sandwich choices. Entrees include langoustine-saffron pasta with fennel and white wine chive sauce or smoke roasted pork loin with horseradish whipped potatoes and barbecued onions.

At Tribute, guests might try smoked salmon and foie gras starters; baby octopus and shrimp with soy wasabi sauce; continued courses of Japanese BBQ ribs and entrees of Atlantic fluke or rack of lamb and dessert of butterscotch creme brulee.

At Forte appetizers include prosciutto with melon and cracked black pepper or Mexican pizza with chicken, black bean sauce, avocado and mozzarella. Entrees include risotto with portobello mushrooms; duck breast or ribeye steak.

"Dishes are created with a lot of thought, research and trials," she said. "We don't change the menu on a whim, but will add or subtract an item here and there based on popularity or demand. We take the food seriously and a complete menu change here is a very big deal. I listen to the ideas and advice of our chefs."

Like she said, success is about teamwork and respect.

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## HEALDS

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Mountain Cabernet Sauvignon \$44 is highlighted by dark berry, red stone fruits, laurel leaf, dried herbs, coffee and mocha notes.

Enticing rich dark berry flavors lead to a complex, smooth finish.

■ 1998 Robert Craig Affinity \$44, although solidly packed with black cherry and blackberry is not just another fruit bomb.

Herbes de Provence and brown spices accent both aroma and fruit flavors. This complex, full-bodied wine is enjoyable now and will reward those who cellar some bottles for a few years.

■ 1999 Robert Craig Affinity \$48 reveals

ripe, juicy dark fruits overlaid with brown spices and vanilla. Layers of flavors are supported by solid structure and mellow tannins. Delicious now, this wine will also reward those who cellar a few bottles.

The Healds are Troy residents who write about wine, spirits, food, and restaurants for the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers. To leave them a voice mail message, dial (734) 953-2047, mailbox 1864H.

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