

To classroom Welcome, diners

By ETHEL SIMMONS

The menu at the Clipboard restaurant is attached to an ordinary clipboard. At the bottom it reads: "Welcome to our classroom. We're glad you're here."

Part of the Southeast Oakland Vocational Education Center in Royal Oak, the Clipboard is open weekdays to the public for luncheon. Prices are estimated to be 40 percent lower than most other restaurants.

Ben Pearlman, bearded, twinkly-eyed chef instructor runs the food service program with ease but firm discipline.

The 100 students enrolled are there because they want to learn about cooking, serving, hostessing, managing or owning a food service operation.

THE MIDDLE class session operates the Clipboard restaurant, and everybody gets a turn to be a waiter or waitress as well as share in meal preparation.

From 80 to 125 persons eat on Mondays through Thursdays at the Clipboard, which seats 60 customers at a

time. Fridays, between 125 to 175 customers enjoy the buffet.

Customers come "from Farmington, Warren, Rochester, Detroit," according to Pearlman. They hear about it mostly by "word of mouth."

Menus are mailed out once a month to a list of 400 customers. The standard menu is a varied one, with garden fresh salads, offerings from the sandwich board and from the grill. Side orders and beverages complete the regular menu.

IN ADDITION, there's a "special of the day."

One recent morning, Breast of Chicken Eugene was taken off the menu when a power blackout in a five-mile area put the morning session, which begins at 8:30 a.m., two and a half hours behind schedule.

Pearlman adapted, untroubled. "We can serve Chicken Eugene tomorrow—along with the next day's special, Lobster Newburg."

Pearlman described Chicken Eugene as "Chicken breast dredged in flour, sautéed in butter, placed on a piece of ham, on toast, garnished with

a silver dollar mushroom cap, and finished with sauce supreme."

MORE TYPICAL fare is hamburger deluxe—one-quarter pound ground round served with shoestring potatoes, onion rings, cold slaw, lettuce and tomato. The potatoes and onion rings are light, not oily tasting.

Clipboard customers include area school superintendents, teachers and counselors, but the majority of business is from the general public.

Pearlman said many diners are employees of Ford Motor, Consumers Power and Saks at Somerset Mall. The restaurant is popular with senior citizens, too.

The Clipboard Restaurant isn't out to make a profit.

"Our goal is to break even," Pearlman said. "We make a few dollars a month, and it goes into the school's operating fund."

THE ROYAL OAK School System operates the center, funded by Oakland County. It serves 12 school districts, providing vocational training for some 1,600 students in 29 programs.

If you want to wend your way to the Clipboard, it's at 5855 Delemere between Crooks and Coolidge, north of 14 Mile Road. Hours are 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Tuesday through Thursday and from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. Friday.

Another nice thing about the restaurant, from the customer's point of view, the menu says: "no tipping please."



Chef instructor Ben Pearlman supervises preparation of poultry for Chicken Eugene by Terry Beck, Bloomfield Hills Lahser senior (left) and Gary Farley, Madison Heights Madison High junior.



Lin Ignash, Royal Oak Dondoro High junior, prepares Black Bottom Pie for serving.



Michele Naud, Birmingham Seaholm High junior, and Eleanor Egeland, dietitian, put Maurice salads on tray.

Americans just love 'a good cup of coffee'

By GAY RUBIN

Ever since the Boston Tea Party, Americans have been drinking coffee. It was the patriotic thing to do then, and now it has developed into a matter of love.

Americans love the smell, taste, sight, even the thought of coffee, and are always searching for the perfect cup.

In fact, a whole group of coffee experts exists who have a vocabulary and body of knowledge much like wine experts. Some will swear that they have found "it" (the perfect coffee bean, the perfect method of brewing), while others are still looking, experimenting, investing.

There is only one thing that is universally accepted by coffee experts: Freshness is a must.

ALL AGREE that it is best to buy the whole roasted beans and have them ground to suit your brewing method (percolator, drip or even better, grind them at home with a coffee mill, not a grinder that has knives that cut the beans and therefore cut flavor and aroma, but a mill that has a grinding ring).

The longer the ground coffee sits on the shelf, the more flavor escapes, but the whole roasted bean can last almost indefinitely.

"Anywhere from a year to 20 years," one expert estimates.

But which bean to buy? There are a variety—enough to suit every taste bud. They are described by merchants with adjectives like rich, full-bodied, smooth, hearty, mellow, slightly acid, light, and aromatic; the discriminating buyer can decide which might appeal to him.

ONLY A FEW tries will yield the right bean or combination of beans. Experts will tell you certain beans are either "ordinary," "special," "extra special" or "the greatest."

All have exotic names: Jamaica Blue-Mountain, for example, is considered "the greatest." A rare coffee, it is expensive, as coffee goes.

"But," says a devotee, "it is worth it. It's hard to find, but when you do, you have paid only a few dollars to experience the world's finest. The ultimate of something."

While that is a rare treat, a popular choice is Mocha-Java, a blend of two coffees roasted together.

WHATEVER THE choice, flavor is what everyone is after. Besides brewing conditions (soil, moisture, air temperature, length of season) that affect taste, there is a rare important roasting process.

European coffees are roasted longer than American and are therefore stronger. Espresso coffee, for example, is made from beans that have been roasted longer than most beans found in America.

That is what makes it "continental." And that is what gives it the heavy, more biting flavor.

The strongest coffee in America—i.e., coffee that has been roasted the longest—is French Roast. It is almost entirely black and is very strong and bitter. It is used mostly as a blend for standard roast coffees to add spice for after-dinner drinks that appeal to some palates.

BUT KNOWING your beans is not all. Besides the bean, there is the method of brewing. Most popular with coffee buffs seems to be the filter method (Mellin and Chemex make good, reasonably priced pots).

The brewing instrument consists of a glass carafe with a funnel-like top into which one places a paper filter. Hot water is poured over the finely ground coffee and drips down into the carafe, producing a very clear (ground-free) cup of coffee.

The principle behind the method is that boiling water is the enemy. Boiling water must never touch the grounds—that was discovered by a chemist about 30 years ago when he invented the Chemex. Heat, he said, releases oils and other elements that make coffee bitter and give you indigestion.

A variation on this theme is found in the French method. Water and coffee are put in the glass pot at the same time. After a few minutes, one pushes the metal filter to the bottom and, voila, a splendid cup of French coffee.

ESPRESSO COFFEE requires a special pot, too. This one works by "explosion." The coffee is forced up through a grimo inside the pot.

Percolating is considered by some as second rate, but experts say there is a way to percolate a good cup of coffee. Use a wide, shallow basket for the coffee. Heat the water in the bottom of the pot just until it starts to boil, reduce the heat and put the coffee basket and pump in. Percolate for five minutes, then remove the coffee basket.

Remember not to use soap and water when cleaning the pot: just rinse it out, so the natural coffee oils will flavor the pot (like with salad bowls) and when the pot is not in use, keep it filled with water so the oils don't get rancid.

For the true experimenter, the newest way to brew coffee is with the Toddy Pot. It has just been invented—or rather, borrowed from ancient Peruvian coffee makers.

TODAY'S VERSION consists of a glass carafe with a white plastic bowl that fits on top. There is also a filter, a rubber plug and a measure. The idea is that if heat is the enemy of good coffee, then cold is the friend. Thus, all brewing is done with cold water.

The optimum temperature the coffee reaches is room temperature, so certain undesirable oils and fuscages that are released at higher temperatures never enter the coffee. (According to some, it is not the caffeine that keeps people awake at night but the fuscages.)

The procedure is simple: Just dump a pound of your favorite ground coffee into the white bowl along with about seven cups of cold water (no stirring). The gloopy mixture sits overnight. In the morning remove the stopper and a thick, syrupy liquid drips into the carafe.

This is coffee concentrate and is used like instant. It yields about 20 to 30 cups of coffee and can be refrigerated indefinitely.

IS IT WORTH IT? There are already some converts who say yes. In fact, there is one man, who takes his concentrate with him on trips. He can't drink anything else now that he has found his cup of coffee.

The Toddy Pot, along with the French, the Espresso, the Chemex, the grinder, and 30 varieties of coffee are available at Adler/Schnee, in Detroit. A resident coffee expert, Ed Schnee, can give all sorts of coffee lore and legends along with advice.

"It all depends on the one who is making the coffee. You've got to experiment," he explains as he demonstrates each utensil.

The Gourmet Shop at the Continental Market in Birmingham, also has a coffee expert, Juanita Hickling, and eight varieties of coffee that come in huge burlap sacks, so you can mix and match as you please.

ONE MAN, who could speak no English, walked in one day, tasted a bean from each sack, then with only hand gestures, he showed just the amount and mixture he wanted. That is the ultimate coffee taster.

Not many coffee lovers have reached that degree of fluency. But in the search for that perfect cup, many are well on their way.