

taste buds
chef Larry
Janes

Don't judge a restaurant on one visit

A week doesn't go by without someone asking my opinion. Strange thing however, they never want my opinion about the steaks, market, or taxes, or what kind of ball point pen I prefer. Nine times out of 10, the question is "where should I go to eat?"

After ascertaining whether or not the person can afford a Big Mac or a big bill, yours truly usually ends up making suggestions not where to go, but more importantly, where to stay away from.

Being in the "business" of food, I am fortunate that most weeks I get the opportunity to "dine out" at least 3-4 times.

Unfortunately, my waist shows this unappreciated "blessing" a little too readily.

Yes, I do suffer 3-4 times per week sweating off all the avoirdupois in an aerobics class or beating myself up to death with resistance weights. Joan Collins is finally telling the truth, we all have to pay our dues.

It really irks me when people ask for a recommendation, then when a restaurant name is dropped, they raise their eyebrows to the ceiling and say "ohhhhh, there're'???"

Let those without sin cast the first stone, but let's face it, you have to be a "food" person in order to fairly judge a restaurant. Just because Big Boy's doesn't make stuffed cabbage like your mamma used to is not reason enough to trash the joint.

Likewise, hollandaise is hollandaise is hollandaise and when it's made with too much lemon and not enough oil, someone's in the kitchen with Dineah — and he's not paying enough attention to the way things should be.

One comment that is cast in stone for any restaurant reviewer is never to judge an eatery on just one visit. Everything is relative and even I have a bad day in the kitchen, (although not too frequently) every now and then.

Food alone obviously is not the quest of most people when dining out — however irrational that may seem. The minute I walk into an establishment, my "antennae" are out, not necessarily to look for the obvious, but to make sure the obvious is not overlooked. Simple observations like cleanliness, promptness and the handling of simple requests are simple guidelines that every person in the hospitality business should know and understand.

Believe it or not, I have lost track of the number of times I have had my waitperson (no sexual discrimination here) try to intimidate me into settling for something that I did not feel appropriate. Whatever happened to the old adage "the customer is always right?"

Having been a food handler, manager, bartender and a waiter in establishments ranging from Burger King to a four star restaurant, I believe I can talk with experience on this subject. Of course, let's not forget to mention all the old crabs who had a bad day at the office and decide to take everything out on their waitperson. A 15 percent gratuity doesn't even come close to what I have done to satisfy an over-demanding customer.

Enough griping about the staff, let's get down to basics: Food Value. I'm not talking a large grocery chain here, I'm referring to getting enough quality food for what I pay.

Alcohol is the biggest consumer rip-off in any restaurant, but many restaurateurs will tell you that's how they make their living. Seems a little wacky to me that a restaurant that serves great food has to worry about carrying customers on their alcohol tab alone.

I have dined at "fancy" restaurants that pass out four ounces of meat on a plate and three tablespoons of sauce, plus a basket of breadsticks and a plate of half-margarine-half-butter in front of you, then have the gall to charge \$9.95 for about a buck's worth of food. Good restaurants will average about 30-35 percent in food costs so when checking for value, figure that one-third of the price was paid for the food alone. Are you enjoying the food or are you paying for the gold-plated ashtrays?

When making determinations about the menu, I make note of what the restaurant does well. Are they trying to make everyone happy with 147 different selections, 27 appetizer choices, six salad entrees, three hot and two cold soups, and finally 73 varieties of ice cream and just as many toppings?

You catch my drift? If you know what I mean about trying to find a place that makes a good tuna sandwich nowadays. Know any? Do a few things, but do them well. Nowadays with most food service establishments using processed soup "bases" it's getting more difficult to tell if the soup is truly "homemade."

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Kathy Rymal prepares a weekly allotment of meals at the West Bloomfield home of Hinda and Joseph Brody. The Brodys follow the strict Pritikin diet and needed someone knowledgeable in the use of natural spices and the preparation of no-salt, no-oil and no-sugar dishes. Fresh vegetables are a big part of the healthy foods Rymal makes, including barley bean and mushroom soup, lentil-rice loaf, zucchini casserole and vegetarian lasagna.

Creative cook is Clean Cuisine

By Rebecca Haynes
staff writer

When Charles Flieger comes home from a hard day's work, he doesn't have to worry about what he'll eat for dinner. He just throws his Clean Cuisine in the oven.

Not Clean Cuisine — Clean Cuisine. No, you haven't missed a new brand of frozen dinners at your local supermarket. To get it, you need to hire the services of Kathy Rymal, founder of her one-woman company, Clean Cuisine.

"I've always enjoyed working with food," said Rymal, a 29-year-old Ferndale resident who spent several years working at health food restaurants, including the In Season in Royal Oak. "One day I was waiting on a couple who asked me if I knew anyone who could prepare health foods and was interested in cooking in people's homes."

"I thought about it for a couple of days and called them and decided to do it myself," she said. "I thought it would be a good way to get to prepare the kinds of food I was eating."

Since Rymal began her business in June, it has expanded from cooking for people on strict diets to cooking for people who either just want to eat more sensibly or don't have the time to cook themselves. Her clients range from people in their 20s to senior citizens.

MANY OF her first customers were on the strict Pritikin diet and needed someone knowledgeable about health foods and spices to prepare meals with no salt, oil or refined sugar.

"For a lot of people, changing their diets and trying to eat more healthy foods is really foreign. They don't know what to do or how to make things and to learn would take a real big time commitment day after day."

FLIEGER, A clinical social worker and



Natural ingredients are essential in preparing healthy foods that taste great. These safe, organic spices replace refined sugars and salt.

"I have a real interest in health foods and have been eating them for long enough that I can convert just about any regular recipe to a health food recipe. I use lots of herbs, and you just develop a cooking style that most people aren't used to. They feel like they don't know where to start."

"A lot of people just want to come home and have tasty and healthy things to eat," she said.

FLIEGER, A clinical social worker and

Troy bachelor, is one such client.

"I like knowing that the health food is there when I want to eat it and I don't have to eat fast food," he said. "People are becoming real creatures of convenience and their priorities are changing. I can't see myself stuffing cabbage rolls."

Rymal works out her cooking schedule depending on the needs of her clients.

"Some of my customers plan their own meals and have the food ready and I just go to their homes and cook," she said. "For oth-

ers, I plan their menus, do the marketing and then cook the food."

"It depends on their needs. The most I usually do at once is a soup and four entrees. I'll spend anywhere from three to seven hours at their home."

Once the food is prepared, it's stored in the refrigerator or freezer until it's ready to be eaten. Among her specialties are a vegetarian lasagna, barley bean and mushroom soup, lentil-rice loaf, zucchini casserole and oriental and brown rice dishes.

BEFORE SHE takes on a new customer, Rymal said she sits down with the prospective client and discusses their food likes and dislikes and any special dietary restrictions she needs to work within.

"I don't want to cook something for them that they're not going to like," she said. "Response has been really good and it's great to see people really enjoy something you do for them."

Flieger said he is very pleased with the service.

"Kathy really has a way of taking health foods and making them very palatable and enjoyable, not medicinal," he said. "It never ceases to amaze me the things she comes up with. When she repeats a meal it's usually been so long since I've had it that I don't remember."

Although she makes food in weekly batches for Flieger, he said she is flexible enough to reduce the quantity on request.

"If I ate at home every night it would cut down on my social life," he said. "If I ask she'll make a little less so I can have a day or two to go out and eat."

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Chef's recipe includes culinary school

By Susan Steinhilber
staff writer

What's the recipe for becoming a successful professional chef?

Those in the profession are likely to say the ingredients are the same as other professions, requiring a blending of, for example, hard work and ambition.

But more and more, there is a new addition to the dish of successful chefdom. While chefs used to learn their trade on the job, now, more and more aspiring chefs are receiving training at a culinary arts school.

"It's becoming more evident all the time," according to Robert Breithaupt, assistant dean of instruction for culinary disciplines at Schoolcraft College in Livonia, a school offering a two-year program in the culinary arts.

"You're going to find in the next five to six to ten years, that it's going to be difficult to find a qualified certified cook or chef that does not have at least a two year degree in the culinary arts discipline."

ANOTHER LOCAL school offering a culinary arts program is Oakland Community

College in Farmington Hills.

Robert Zemke, OCC hospitality department chairperson, agrees that schooling is becoming more of a requirement among chefs.

"It's not like it used to be," he said. "The idea that 'I'll go out and work with somebody,' it's dying very quickly. It's not like it was five years ago. If you have two people with equal talent — even with my own staff — I'll hire the one with the college education."

"This area is a little different," he added. "You have a very active chefs organization here, the Michigan Chefs De Cuisine, and they really push education. So with that in mind, chefs are not so anxious to hire a person and train them to be a cook."

High school graduation is usually the only requirement for entering a culinary arts school.

Zemke notes, however, that school does not make the chef.

"No school, no matter how formal, will put out chefs. We put out, hopefully, good cooks. 'Chef' is a title that's earned. . . you know, you go to shows, you win medals, you show creative talent and things like that."

"A chef is a manager of a kitchen."

Breithaupt said the growth of the hospitality industry — he says it is now the world's second largest — is a major reason for the demand for qualified, trained employees within the industry.

THE DEMAND, which he said continues to grow, has led to the rise in the past few years of two-year culinary arts schools and programs at the post secondary level, such as those offered by Schoolcraft and OCC.

In the 1930s, the rare culinary arts program was offered at the high school level, Breithaupt said.

So, chefs often came from Europe, or American chefs were trained there, as that is where apprenticeship programs were offered.

By the mid 1950s, there were "less than a dozen" programs offered at community colleges throughout the country, he said.

It was only in the 1960s that community colleges started to look at such programs, said Breithaupt.

"Since then we have had a tremendous

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— Robert Zemke
OCC hospitality department

growth of the two-year colleges starting programs in cooking."

REGARD AMERICAN trained chefs as well as those trained in Paris?

"Oh, absolutely, yes," said Breithaupt. Within the last ten years, American cuisine, chefs, and schools, have been coming into

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