

When is price right?

Did you ever stop and wonder why a bottle of apple juice at grocery store "A" sells for 97 cents while the same exact bottle at store "B" sells for \$1.39?

Just exactly how much difference is there in a can of Campbell's Chicken Noodle Soup, especially when one store has it 39 cents and when you take a walk around the corner to another grocery, there the same can sits for 48 cents?

I know there are more important questions in this world to be asked, but when you think about how many cans of Campbell's soup pass through cash register scanners nowadays, doesn't it make you wonder?

We're not talking pennies here, folks. Do a little comparison shopping and see for yourself. Or are the major grocery chains expecting us to get our soup from store "A," our juices from store "B" and our paper products from store "C"?

PERSONALLY, I LIKE to shop at one local grocery, not necessarily for the prices but for the simple fact that I'm always no further than second in line and what's probably more important, to have a cashier personally say, "Thank you," rather than hearing it from a computer.

From what I can garner, fewer than 10 percent of us use grocery coupons when shopping for groceries. It almost makes me want to say, "Na-na-na-na-na," when I observe the person in front of me buying many of the same basic items but the difference is the bottom dollar. With coupons, I pay less.

I'll even go so far as to say the person behind me in line probably has even more coupons, and deep down that person's little voice is echoing the same verse because I only saved 25 cents on my toilet paper while that individual has a 35-cent coupon.

So does this mean that coupons are to blame for the 42-cent difference in bottled apple juice between store "A" and store "B"?

Now that I have the old cynical juices flowing, something else has my curiosity piqued about grocery stores. What do they do with all the leftover meat, fish and poultry that doesn't sell by the expiration date? Do they grind up the T-bone steaks into hamburger? Is it true they repackaging the fish and put it in the freezer for some poor unsuspecting dolt to come by and pay top dollar for five-day-old frozen fish?

FREQUENTLY I SEE a shopping cart full of mushrooms that belong in a petrie dish along with black bananas and bruised apples, but when was the last time you saw a rib-eye steak marked down 50 percent?

I think it would be a good idea for the grocery stores to lay off a few of those bluish-gray-haired women who pass out samples of prune danish and liverwurst and incorporate an information booth in the center of the store between dog food and cereals so that folks like you and me can ask these questions.

Nothing unnerves me more than to stop by the manager's booth and have him/her look down on me from behind a 15-foot wall saying they have no control over the store's pricing policies. Personally, I think all grocery store managers are four-foot midgets who hide behind these managerial booster walls, just waiting for the moment to get on the loudspeaker and tell some poor 16-year-old bagger to go out in two feet of snow and bring in more baskets.

Let Gorbachev worry about Azerbaijan and let Bush deal with arms reduction. I'll let you know if I get any response from the store managers or food dealers.



"Randy" Chanyawatankul, owner of Siam Spice in Royal Oak, shows dishes with fried rice in Thai style: peapod and shrimp (left) and Siam Spice fried rice with chili paste.

Americans have long loved rice

By Irene H. Burchard
special writer

RICE, THE STAPLE food for hundreds of millions in Asian countries, has been part of the traditional American meal since it was first grown in the United States more than 300 years ago.

The history of rice in North America began with colonization of the new land. During America's colonial period the Carolinas were consid-

ered to be the most fertile land. By 1726, the Port of Charleston, S.C., was exporting nearly 4,500 metric tons of rice annually and during the next four years rice exports doubled.

Fifty years later, after America gained its independence, rice had become one of the country's major agricultural businesses.

From its scanty beginnings in South Carolina, rice has become a major agricultural product of the

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Chef Vincenzo Bassonatti at Cafe Vincenzo in Garden City with risotto primavera and risotto pescatore.

Thais serve rice with every meal

By Janice Brunson
staff writer

Rice in Thailand is comparable in importance to potatoes in Bolivia or bread in America. It is the mainstay of nearly every meal, served morning, noon and night to balance other foods and fill hungry stomachs.

"People in Thailand eat rice or rice noodles, actually more rice than rice noodles, like people here eat bread," said "Randy" Chanyawatankul, owner of Siam Spice, a restaurant featuring Thai food that opened in Royal Oak eight months ago.

Until then, Chanyawatankul had been an architect, arriving in the

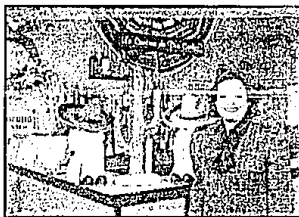
United States from Bangkok in 1974 to study at Wayne State University.

"I always wanted to get into the restaurant business, for a long, long time. I love cooking and tasting food. So, I just decided to do it," Chanyawatankul said in English gently laced with a Thai accent.

Accompanying each entree served at Siam Spice is a bountiful bowl of rich steamed rice, special sticky or semi-sticky varieties containing additional starch that are grown in Thailand and exported as Riceland throughout the Far East.

Chanyawatankul must buy bags

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GUY WARREN/staff photographer

Rice browned a la Mexico

By Janice Brunson
staff writer

Long-grained rice washed snow white and browned to transparency is the key to superb Mexican-style

rice, according to restaurant entrepreneur Maria Shaffran, who daily serves up mouth-watering fare seasoned with her own pungent tomato sauce.

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Italian risotto popular

By Janice Brunson
staff writer

When an especially creative mood strikes chef Vince Bassonatti of Garden City, he delights unsuspecting patrons of Cafe Vincenzo with a perfect risotto of rice, topped with plump shrimp, delicate chicken liver or fresh primavera.

Risotto not consumed on the spot is fashioned the following day into rich arangino, dumpling-like rice

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The Cooker scene: American regional

Some down-home Southern dishes — as well as a range of regional entrees from Yankee pot roast to Hawaiian steak — are cooking at the new Cooker restaurant in Livonia.

The restaurant, first of a Nashville-based chain to locate in Michigan, has a menu that would appeal to almost anyone — and an atmosphere for which that is true also. It's noisy — so beware — but the noise coming from conversations bouncing off the tile floor and wood booths is more like background music that will absorb the cries of a baby or provide privacy for an intimate conversation.

Upon first glance, the Cooker Bar and Grille looks like a trendy place a la Friday's. But the night we visited, the restaurant was filled with older couples, young families and everyone in between. Even on a week night, it was crowded, surprising because the restaurant relies only on word-of-mouth advertising.

Or maybe that's not so surprising given the fact that the menu is anything but dull, and the prices are exceptionally reasonable. Though it offers the expected selection of burgers and salads, it has an exceptional array of "regional American" dishes. We tried the lime chicken (\$7.95) and Hawaiian steak (\$8.95) and found both to be very well prepared and tasty.



THE LIME CHICKEN is one of Cooker's specialties and features a half chicken marinated in lime, garlic, white wine and honey before being grilled. The combination of seasonings made for a very delicious dish and the marinade definitely penetrated the meat — instead of just resting on the skin.

Though almost all the other chicken dishes are boneless, this was on the bone but was moist enough to cut off easily. Only fault with this dish was that a pre-packaged moist towel was unappetizingly served on the dinner plate.

The Hawaiian steak was cooked as ordered and pleasantly flavored with a teriyaki sauce. The steak came with onion strings — a version of onion rings where the rings are silvered.

Both entrees were served with a small broccoli-cheese casserole, which was a little mushy for our taste. Next time we will try the green beans cooked with bacon. The seasoned french fries were delicious. A la carte side dishes also include squash, baked potato and baked cinnamon apples.

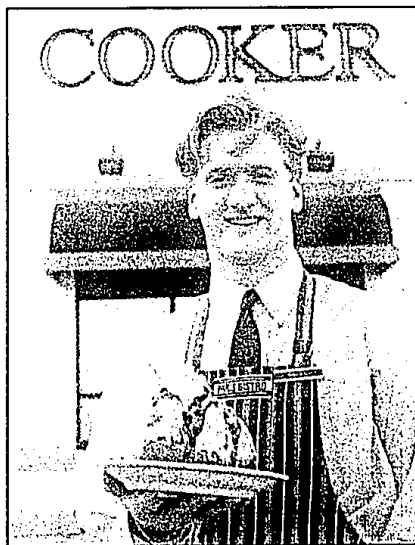
The soups were good, including a vegetable cheese soup that was a little cool on arrival and a very warm potato cheese soup that featured chunks of potatoes and a tasty blend of cheeses.

Details:
The Cooker Bar and Grille, 38703 Seven Mile at I-275, Livonia, 482-3650.

Hours: Monday-Thursday 11 a.m. to 10:30 p.m.; Friday-Saturday, 11 a.m. to 11:30 p.m.; Sunday, noon to 10:30 p.m. Bar stays open one hour later Monday-Saturday.

Prices: \$3.95-\$10.95, with most full meals \$5-9. All entrees available as carryout.

Value: Great variety, good cooking and very reasonable prices.



JIM JAGDELO/staff photographer

Brian Crawford, waitperson, shows Snickers Pie, a specialty at the Cooker Bar & Grille in Livonia. A chopped Snickers bar is just one of the ingredients.