

taste buds

chef Larry
James

A honey of a gift from bees

"My son, eat thou honey because it is good; and the honeycomb, which is sweet to thy taste."

— Proverbs 24:13

Ever since man discovered honey, this delectable product made by bees from flower nectar has been the standard for judging one of the most pleasant human sensations — the taste of sweetness.

Since ancient times, the words "honey" and "honey-sweet" have been used as terms of endearment.

In cooking, honey can replace white or brown sugar in most circumstances. Because honey contains 80 percent sugar and 20 percent water, some adjustments must be made.

For baking, use about 25 percent more honey than sugar by weight and reduce the amount of other liquids accordingly.

When a recipe calls for sugar, start by replacing honey for half the amount of sugar and experiment from there.

AS A seasoning, honey helps bring out hidden flavors.

Root vegetables like carrots and rutabagas will always profit from a touch of honey.

In rural parts of America, home-grown tomatoes still are eaten with a sprinkle of sugar or sparingly spread with honey, the sweetening bringing out the flavor better than salt.

Most of us are used to the multitude of plastic and glass jars of honey available locally in our grocery stores.

But honey comes in an infinite variety of flavors, each taking credit from the assortment of nectar gathered by the bees.

SINGLE-SOURCE HONEY is produced in regions where a crop that is a good honey plant — apple trees, alfalfa and clover, for instance — is grown over a large area. Hives of bees are brought into the area for the flowering period of the crop, usually several weeks.

(By the way, bees are seldom left permanently as they would have no food for the rest of the year.)

Bees tend to gather nectar from one kind of blossom, if possible, and they fill their combs in orderly fashion.

Smaller-scale beekeepers, by keeping track of blooming times of the flowers in their vicinities, are quite accurate in naming the dominant flower sources and tastes of their honey.

BALDUCCI'S in New York City, one of the largest food shops in the country, offers 34 kinds of honey, including Tasmanian leatherwood, and Italian chestnut honey that is so thick it must be gouged from the jar with a spoon.

More locally, Zingerman's Deli in Ann Arbor's Kerrytown has just as impressive a list of honeys from which to choose.

Janet Mason, in retail sales at Zingerman's, said their biggest sellers are the Petoskey-based American Spoon Foods assortment of Blueberry Blossom and Northern Wild Flower honeys.

Both sell for \$4.49 for 11 ounces and have equally impressive flavors to match the prices.

They also feature an unheated, creamed honey with pollen and an Oregon Aprisles line of apricot, strawberry, blueberry and raspberry-flavored honey, which she said is outstanding on waffles and French toast and while cooking wild game.

Their prices are comparatively a little higher than the \$4.50 I paid recently at the Eastern Market for a 4-pound jar of pure Michigan honey from the T.M. Klein and Sons farm, but if you have a discerning palate for intriguing flavors, the extra cost might just be worth it.



What it takes to make school lunches for four Boedigheimer youngsters.

Brown baggers off to school

'Mr. Mom' helps to pack nutritious lunches for kids

By Larry James
special writer

THIRTY-ONE YEARS AGO today, I was walking to what used to be St. Joe's School in Wyandotte, one hand grasping a blue-corduroy school bag while the other held firmly to my Larry, Moe and Curly (the Three Stooges) lunch pail.

The old thermos, which according to Momma must have been designed by one of the Stooges, had long since been replaced by ones with Felix the Cat, Dick Tracy or the omnipotent Shadow.

The contents of the lunch pail consisted of a baloney sandwich — plain, of course; a double bonus pack of Twinkies (see, I'm not that old) and a rust-spotted apple. The sandwich was wrapped in waxed paper (plastic wrap and Baggies hadn't been invented yet).

Whenever the thermos broke or the lid couldn't be found in time, a nickle was securely taped to the lid of the lunch pail with Scotch tape for a one-pint glass bottle of Wilson milk. There was always a paper napkin, folded into a triangle, that was used only rarely and then only to wipe the blood from a scraped knee or elbow.

Times have changed and now lunch boxes are adorned with New Kids on the Block, the same old Twinkies, but this time single-wrapped, not doubled; apples that could make any art teacher sigh with envy, and, in most instances, a disposable juice box with flexible straw.

THE NAPKIN might possibly be a single sheet of paper towel, made of recycled fibers, or maybe even a Handi-Wipe individually secured in its own wrapper. Milk is 35 cents.

But things are just a little different at the Boedigheimer house in Livonia. Momma Boedigheimer (Charlotte) owns Around the World Travel in Farmington Hills, and when she goes off to work in the morning, Papa Boedigheimer (Jim), a self-proclaimed "Mr. Mom," has everything sitting out on the kitchen counters, waiting for all the Boedigheimer children to pack their own brown bags.

With Sheri, 13, an eighth grader at Holmes Middle School; Marti, 15, a 10th grader at Stevenson High School; Ben, 16, an 11th grader at Stevenson, and Nathan, 18, an Oakland Community College student, Bart Simpson lunch pails are out and paper bags filled with baloney (some things never change), chicken sandwiches, plenty of fresh fruits and an occasional granola bar is what's "in."

This writer made a few random calls to other parents of school-age children and was somewhat surprised to find:

- Healthy-for-you breads like wheat and rye don't get eaten, so more than 80 percent of the households polled still use plain old Wonder (60 percent say they still remove crusts, however).

- Fruits of some sort are always packed in more than 95 percent of the lunches, with most relying on apples, pears and an occasional banana. Fruit roll-up and fruit leathers are gaining in popularity but less than 10 percent will pack cut-up fruits.

- Vegetables are still used for squirrel food. The broccoli and carrot sticks just aren't eaten unless accompanied with a ranch-type dip.

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JIM JAGDELD/staff photographer

Marti, who is from China (left), Sheri from Costa Rica and Ben from India put together their lunches at Boedigheimer household in Livonia.

Eye-appealing Food is as good as the view



At R.I.K.'s, diners are greeted by a view into the restaurant's kitchen where the staff industriously stirs up the regional Italian specialties. It's a silent scene, since the vista is through a honey, arched frame of windows decorated with utensils and sprigs of herbs.

Bistro under glass, we call it. And R.I.K.'s is an intriguing blend of styles in a clearly superior restaurant.

The restaurant's two long, rectangular dining rooms are separated by a beautiful wall of arches and the lace blinds on the front windows let natural light stream in.

A bar area is more stark, with more contemporary black-and-white flooring and subdued lighting. Live jazz is performed Wednesday-Saturday nights.

R.I.K.'s new fall menu allows for plenty of innovation from the kitchen. Most weekends, guests will be given the standard, extensive menu;

a list of evening specials, and an oral presentation of items added as recently as that day.

Many of the specials are fish entrees, such as the superb scallop dinner we enjoyed, with its rosemary-lagron sauce with shillake mushrooms. Quail also was special that evening, two birds tenderly prepared and jazzed up with spices.

The health-conscious diner will find lots of appropriate entrees designated on the menu by hearts — and can order the fresh fish entrees cooked as desired.

There's even a low-fat beef entree, beef tenderloin grilled and served with mushrooms, shallots, garlic and potatoes.

BUT LET'S NOT forget this is an Italian restaurant, and authentic Italian dishes here have a flair.

Like the gemelli, a pasta tossed with wild mushrooms, herbs and walnut pesto, or the farfalle, bowtie pasta with shrimp or grilled chicken, peppers and broccoli in a mustard sauce.

Risotto, a delicious Italian treatment of rice, offers endless possibilities. R.I.K.'s apparently intends to

try them all. A new risotto dish is prepared daily.

We tried a version with diced vegetables and were thoroughly pleased. Good risotto is cooked slowly, resulting in a creamy consistency. This was good risotto, though pricey at \$9 for an appetizer.

Another nice Italian appetizer is the focaccia — Italian bread with red onion and sage served with a roasted garlic. It looks, smells and tastes wonderful.

FOR SOUP, a tomato-based "zuppa" with mussels, calamari and clams is an excellent chowder-type selection. Those who can't tolerate squid have another good alternative in the traditional vegetable soup.

Dinner salads can get pretty routine, a little lettuce, a couple of wedges of tomatoes, maybe a cucumber or crostons, all tossed with a vinaigrette of sorts.

Not so at R.I.K.'s, where the house salad is superb. It features bibb lettuce and spinach tossed with the restaurant's delicious tomato Caesar Italian dressing.

THOUGH NOT enough can be said



DEAN DEAN/staff photographer

HeartSmart Pizza (left) and Frutti Dimore are two specialties at R.I.K.'s, the Restaurant, in West Bloomfield.

about the food, all is not perfect.

We found eating at R.I.K.'s is like being in a rugby scrimmage. Maybe it's bistro out of control. Tables are jammed dangerously close to each other, and those unfortunate enough to be seated in an aisle are apt to be bumped constantly by the steady stream of attendants. One in our party counted six such bumps.

DETAILS: R.I.K.'s, the Restaurant, 6203 Orchard Lake Road north of Maple Road in Orchard Mall, West Bloomfield, 855-9889.

Hours: Lunch Monday-Friday 11:30 a.m. to 3 p.m., dinner Monday-Thursday 5-10 p.m., Friday-Saturday 5-11 p.m., Sunday 5-9 p.m.

Reservations accepted for lunch, parties of five or more, and dinner.

Prices: Lunch \$3.50-\$9.50, dinner \$6.95-\$19.95. All credit cards.

Value: Good for the food and price range, but the seating needs to be aired out.

Rating: ★★ ★