

taste buds

chef Larry Janes

Buying goose is a ritual

As I sit in front of a newfangled word processor complete with floppy disk drives, I survey the kitchen. To my left, a microwave oven that will cook vegetables in seconds, a phone machine that automatically answers, dials, holds, programs and gives me the date and time of calls, and to its left a food processor that dices, slices, minces, chops, grates and purees faster than a speeding bullet.

Then there's the electric can opener, a sleep-programmable coffee pot that when programmed will have a steaming hot cup waiting for my arrival, and a cordless mixer. The sink has a Dishmaster. The dishwasher will rinse, scrub and chew up any food waste that the garbage disposal won't have a chance at. The marvel of an oven can bake, broil and convection complete with a 33-page instruction manual that took me six hours to figure out how to activate the self-cleaning module.

Certainly there must be elves hiding inside the freezer because whenever I open it, there's a nary a sign of frost build-up, something that Momma still does with pots of boiling water and a washer load of towels once every season.

I won't even begin to count or identify the mélange of gadgets, both electrical and manual, that when activated will slow cook, pressure cook, whip, fold, blend, sharpen, staple, seal, freeze, deep fry and chop.

THIS WEEK, I will jump into an electronically temperature-controlled vehicle and venture on down to the Eastern Market for something that will bring back memories of holidays past. A goose.

I will park in a covered garage and take an elevator down to the main street. There, I will begin a trek through a forest of pine-scented trees, wreaths, garland and grave blankets. I will breathe in wisps of kerosene-heated air spewing from my chimneys and witness farmers hawking everything from tiny black walnuts to humongous Hubbard squash that could certainly double as pot people.

I will cross over I-75 bundled to the hilt in Thermopile, down wool and waterproofed synthetic boots, probably with two kids in tow, looking for a poultry store. This poultry store will have no evidence of styrofoam trays, sonically controlled refrigerated cases and packages of Shake and Bake adorning the shelves.

The floors will be covered with a combination of poultry dung and pinfeathers. We will be thankful we wore boots. Upon entering, there will be antique-looking wooden crates no taller than a foot but twice as wide and deep. The air will be filled with a pungent aroma befitting an over-stuffed barnyard.

WE WILL HEAR quacks and clucks and gobbles while occasionally tending off a torrent of feathers and squawks as a bird is readied for another customer.

After choosing our Christmas dinner, we will be offered feet, a head and a package not wrapped in plastic but exuding a warmth, wrapped in butcher's paper. At this one poultry store, in addition to money changing hands, we will also be offered a handshake and a wish for a happy holiday.

A return trip through the market to our car will find us purchasing potatoes, leeks, some apples and a gallon of cider, which will be warmed and scented with cinnamon, cloves and nutmeg. This will be enjoyed on Christmas Eve as we don our coats to fill the drive and walkway with candied humulites.

On Christmas morn, after witnessing firsthand the sights and sounds of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and Barbie, the goose will be readied for dinner that eve.

That will be Christmas 1990. The Jones Gang holiday wish to you is that we will always be free to enjoy holiday traditions. Felix Navidad!

Observing holiday traditions

Ethnic heritages are celebrated

By Janice Brunson
staff writer

FOLLOWING CHRISTMAS Eve services tonight at St. Mary's Orthodox Church, members of the Farhat family will gather in the Livonia home of parents Mona and Fred.

The family will gather in the Livonia home of parents Mona and Fred for a light breakfast of fresh grapes, Arabic cheese, sesame bread and coffee studded with pungent cardamom.

Gathered about are Alex, 28; Janet, 22; and Jenny, 14. Sunday, 24, is accompanied by her children, Ricky, Tracy and Ryan, ages 5, 3 and 1.

Tomorrow, the family shares a holiday feast of leg of lamb, Arabic stuffing seasoned with pine nuts and almonds, meat pies called *lufcha* and kibbeh patties of minced lamb and wheat. An array of sweets also is prepared, cheese *katalifi*, kutter syrup seasoned with rose water and kuttles, shaped into half moons and seasoned with walnuts.

The meal is decidedly Ramallahian, based on the ancient traditions of Christian Palestinians and carried forth each year by the Farhats as part of the family's heritage.

"My mother always did it. I keep tradition and have all the same things she did," said Mona, whose parents, as well as those of husband Fred, immigrated to the United States from the village of Ramallah when each was young.

Today, more Ramallah natives reside in the United States than in the ancient village. In 1948 Ramallah ceased being a part of Palestine and is now a part of Israel.

Ramallahans are Christian, and by maintaining traditional holiday cuisine this Christmas, Mona Farhat aspires to maintain a Palestinian heritage that otherwise might be lost.

EMMA MINASIAN of Bloomfield Hills also carries forth a cultural heritage facing extinction. Minasian and husband Michael are Armenian. Both sets of parents fled Turkish persecution following World War I, immigrating to the United States.

Though the Minasians speak, read and write Armenian, their four adult children do not. Emma has cultivated ethnic awareness and pride among her offspring by maintaining holiday tradition through culinary expression.

"Food is part of our culture. My kids don't read or write Armenian, but there is always food. And they have strong feelings of pride at being Armenian," she said.

After attending services tonight at "our beloved church" (St. John's Armenian Church in Southfield), the family will feast on traditional fare of lamb, eggplant and wheat, previously transformed into *kutufe* or *plav* spiced with zesty cayenne pepper, cumin, allspice and flat leaf

parsley.

Anooshabour — Armenian Christmas pudding of whole grain wheat, bleached raisins, dried apricots and rosewater — is a special addition, prepared only for events such as Christmas.

HIGHLIGHT OF the holidays for Margareta and Ala Berker of Birmingham, is tonight, Christmas Eve.

This is the moment of greatest celebration in Sweden, according to Margareta, who is Swedish by birth. Based on tradition, Swedes do not work on Christmas Eve, and this is the evening of the traditional feast, the smorgasbord.

The smorgasbord is very well known in the United States," Margareta said, adding she always features *flerring* salad because its red color is particularly suited to a Christmas buffet.

Smorgasbord also offers ham, jellied pig's feet, rice porridge, and fish that has been dried and boiled.

The traditional Christmas Eve feast includes a practice called "dipping in the kettle," Margareta said. Each guest dips his or her bread in a communal dish of broth from the ham. Originally observed only by the poor, dipping is now considered traditional by all.

Following the meal, Tomie or the Christmas gnome, better known in the West as Santa Claus, makes an appearance.

"THEY COOK LIKE they're going to feed an army," noted Jim Plakas, of Christmas holiday meals in traditional Greek style. Plakas, Garden City's mayor, is describing wife Betty's preparations for the couple's holiday meal.

"We all go to Mass. We're scattered around so we go to various churches. Then all of our people gather for Christmas Eve dinner about 9 p.m." This year, the meal will be hosted at the Plakas residence, with some 15 relatives in attendance, including an assortment of nieces and nephews.

"It's more than just family. Everyone real close is invited to break bread. It's more than just a drink. It's to break bread. It's so important to us. It's a must to be here, good friends and family," Plakas said.

The meal tonight consists of the Greek specialty, lemon egg soup, and Greek-style spaghetti, which is less spicy than the more familiar Italian variety.

Tomorrow, Christmas Day, is reserved for the traditional American feast of turkey, dressing and cranberries. It is on this day that individual customs and ethnic traditions give way to a united Christmas celebration that, practiced in the United States, is uniquely American.

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GUY WARREN/staff photographer

In a celebration of holiday festivity laced with cultural heritage, Mona Farhat of Livonia proudly displays tonight's feast. To prepare the food, Farhat draws upon Palestinian traditions carried to the United States years before by her parents. A Christian, she and her family al-

ways celebrate Christmas Eve with a meal of Sweet Knafli (held by Farhat) and (clockwise from left) lamb and rice stuffing, meat pies, stuffed leg of lamb and hummus or chickpea dip.

Mushroom dishes delicious at Morels



With a name like Morels, a Michigan Distro, it's not surprising that this new restaurant in Birmingham Farms is banking heavily on a good spring crop of the elusive, finicky morel mushroom. Morel mushrooms are noted not just for their wonderful, unique flavor — but also for their mysterious growth pattern which, so far, has defied all attempts at being grown in other than their natural woody environment.

Spring '87 was the last really good year for our mushroom hunting, and Spring '90 was probably the worst. But proprietor Matthew Prentice has managed to stockpile enough of the delicacy to keep four entrees with morels on his menu — and Chef Tim Cikra doesn't seem stingy in their use.

The mushroom salad, for instance, features a combination of morels, oyster mushrooms and shiitake mushrooms sautéed and served over a variety of greens and topped with a delicious warm walnut vinaigrette. This salad alone is worth a visit. As with all the salads, it can be ordered to accompany an entree (\$4.95) or as an entree (\$8.95).

Morels also flavor a fettucini primavera, a turkey entree and a strudel appetizer, among other things. Personally, we prefer the salad where the morel taste is more prominent than the primavera where the taste is overpowered, but no entree with morels is a loss.

PRENTICE AND his staff incorporate many Michigan products into their entrees — that is the other half of their theme, after all. Often that means fresh fish, such as lake perch, salmon and rainbow trout. And cherries, such as the sundried cherries incorporated into their deliciously sweet scones prepared by pastry chef Andy McGrath. Or apples incorporated into salads, entrees and the popular dessert of apple pie with apple caramel ice cream.

Everything we tried was delicious, and all meals are reasonably priced at \$9.95 to \$12.95 for diners, excluding salads which are à la carte. The lake perch was fresh, lightly breaded, cooked perfectly and flavored with a tasty walnut, apple-cider cream sauce. This was a special, but even ordinary entrees on the main menu have interesting treatments, such as the grilled turkey marinated in applejack and served on the grilled chicken served with black beans and plum chutney.

Salads, breads and appetizers are

all unique and worthy of special note. The lamb sausage with polenta in a cream sauce with herbs is wonderful — and far different from most appetizers you encounter. Equally different are the "fancy mashed potatoes" flavored with a whitefish caviar.

Among the delicious salads is a grilled duck salad with apples, walnuts and Dijon mustard dressing. There is also a warm potato salad with goat cheese. Because the bread basket is spectacular, you could easily make a pleasant meal of salad and bread. We especially enjoyed the herbed bricioles and the potato bread. Then again, the cherry scones were great too.

Though located in an office building, the restaurant has one of the classier, more comfortable dining rooms around. Diners overlook a lovely atrium where many of the herbs used by the restaurant are grown. Beautiful blond wood tables are sparsely placed, allowing for a little privacy and proving that "bis-ness" doesn't have to be synonymous with noise and too much "closeness."

Details: Morels, a Michigan Distro, 30100 Telegraph, Birmingham, 642-1094.

Hours: Lunch: 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.; dinner 5-11 p.m. Monday-Thursday; 5 p.m. to midnight Friday.

RATING GUIDE

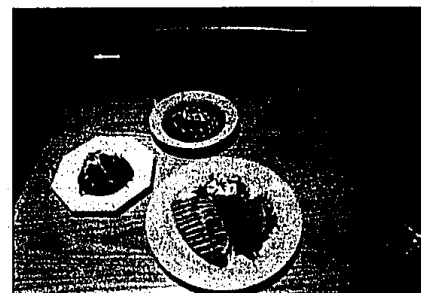
Saturday Closed Sundays. Reservations accepted for lunch and dinner.

Prices: Lunch \$6.95-\$10.95; Dinner \$9.95-\$12.95, à la carte salads \$3.95-\$6.95 with entree. All major credit cards.

Value: A very good deal, prices are good for the meals offered.

Rating: *****

* Average (lots of places with similar quality)
** Good
*** Very good
**** Excellent
***** Consistently superb — a rare honor.



STEPHEN CANTRELL/staff photographer

Chef Tim Cikra and meal featuring grilled fillet of salmon served with a plum wine creme fraiche.