LET'S GO! DINING

Key Largo gets serious about food

BY JUDITH DONER BERNE
SPECIAL WRITER

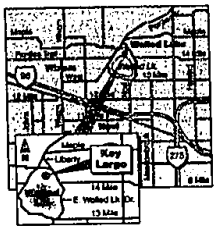
It's not just the water, the year-round Christmas lights, or the sailfish mounted on the walls that call up the Florida Keys.

It's also the fact that Key Largo restaurant is located amidst a jumble of, call them quaint or call them tacky, shops reminiscent of most of the keys you drive through along the Overseas Highway between Homestead and Key West.

But on this wintry day in Walled Lake, the view from the enlarged, can't wait for summer, deck of Key Largo is of bundled-up ice fishermen, not of bare-chested deep sea boat captains.

Inside, however, Key Largo is all warmth, from the friendly reception you receive when you walk in, to the bright, hibiscus-spattered vinyl tablecloths, to the piped-in sounds of steel drums.

It took imagination to turn an abandoned auto dealership into this lakeside restaurant back in 1987. But co-owner Bob Kazanowski says: "You have to fantasize about a restaurant."



Key Largo
142 E. Walled Lake Drive, Walled Lake (810) 669-1441
Menus American seafood, beef, pasta and vegetarian dishes with a Caribbean flavor. ***Lunch:*** Soups, salads, sandwiches, $2.95-$10.95. ***Dinner*** Appetizers, soups, salads, $2.95-$10.95. Entrees, $9.95- $14.05. Desserts, $3.75-$5.50.
Bar Menu $4.95 (Texas-style Chili) to $8.95 (Calamari, Kokomo Club Sandwich, Buffalo Shrimp, Cayman's Salad). ***Children's Menus*** $2.75 (grilled cheese or hot dog; fries or veggie) to $5.95 (baby back ribs and fries).
Entertainment: Friday and Saturday, April-September on the deck.
Reservations: Advised, on all weekends and during the summer.
All major credit cards.
Hours: Lunch, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday-Saturday; Dinner, 4-10 p.m. (11 p.m. in summer) Monday-Thursday; 4-11 p.m. Friday-Saturday (year-round); 3-9 p.m., Sunday; Sunday Brunch, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. May-September.
What to wear: Casual.

His fantasy is coming true, as homes pop up all over neighboring Novi, West Bloomfield and Commerce.

And the hot news, out of his whale-sized (over 300 inside, 200 outside) restaurant this winter day, is that they are aiming for better food to serve this increasingly sophisticated public.

"You can't over gourmet the local people, but we've got to do better than the chains," says Kazanowski, who with his wife, Diane, brothers Dr. John and Larry and mom, Charlotte, are Key Largo's major owners.

Kazanowski, a graduate of Michigan State University's well-regarded hotel and restaurant program, was director of Cranbrook Educational Community's food service and Detroit Lions' training table manager. He currently owns Mason's Lounge in Livonia and managed the original Charley's Crab on Pine Lake.

"It worked," he said of that restaurant, destroyed by fire in the 1970s. "This one works too."

"We've always had the fun setting," Kazanowski says. But the recent hiring of Patrick Dunn, former chef at the Whitney and the Hudson River Club in New York City, cemented their idea of "getting serious" about food and its presentation.

And bringing in Tony Amann, a Livonia resident, as general manager was designed to professionalize service.

For example, servers are given quizzes on menu items and taught to treat each table individually. You need to find out who you're serving, Kazanowski says. "Are they doing a business deal or saving a marriage?"

So the next time you eat at Key Largo, you'll see tailored, upbeat service and a smaller menu of more ambitious dishes.

Why did Dunn take off his gourmet chef's hat for a more casual cap?

"I see this as the way food is going today," Dunn says. "I consider all my cooking classical — with a modern attitude. It's more of a challenge to give them high-end quality, but stay within a budget."

Although he's spending the winter experimenting with the menu, Dunn put forth the following recommendations:

As an entree, he is torn between sword fish ribs, where the bones of the fish are treated like beef or pork ribs, marinated and grilled in a Memphis barbecue sauce; or Seafood Etouffe "Hobo Style" — seafood baked in sacks with "dirty rice."

Dan Sawyer and his mom, Sally Sawyer, both of West Bloomfield, stopped for lunch at Key Largo on a recent Friday.

Both had been there previously for dinner.

Dan raved about the Conch Chowder Bisque — "It's really, really good" as well as their desserts. Sally enjoyed the Chicken Tropicana, a marinated, pan-roasted breast with citrus sauce and scallion cake.

DAN DEAN/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

New menu items: *Bob Kazanowski (left to right), Chef Pat Dunn and Tony Amann present some of the new dishes they're serving at Key Largo.*

Entertaining Choices

Send items to be considered for publication to: Keely Wygonik, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150, or by fax (313)591-7279.

Auditions

TEDD E. BEAR PRODUCTIONS
Auditions for "Todd E. Bear Does Broadway II," 5 p.m., Sun., March 5, Room 150, Jewish Community Center, 6600 W. Maple Road, West Bloomfield. Boys and girls ages 7 to 17, who can sing, dance and act. Call between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. There is a $5 processing fee.
(810) 354-0545

VILLAGE PLAYERS
Auditions for "Nunsense," directed by Daniel Castle, 3 p.m. Sun., March 5, 7:30 p.m. Tues., March 7, 752 Chestnut, Birmingham.
(810) 644-8929

Theater

MEADOW BROOK
Paul Rudnick's comedy "I Hate Hamlet," continues to March 5, Oakland University campus, Rochester. Call the box office, (810) 377-3300 or Ticketmaster for tickets, show times.
(810) 645-6666

JET
"Change of Life," to March 5, Aaron DeRoy Theatre, Jewish Community Center, 6600 W. Maple, W. Bloomfield. Tickets $11-$22, student, senior discounts. Call box office (810) 788-2900 or Ticketmaster, for show times.
(810) 645-6666

STAGECRAFTERS
John Patrick Shanley's "Italian American Reconciliation," opens 8 p.m. Fri., March 3 and continues weekends to March 12, 415 S. Lafayette, Royal Oak. Shanley, author of the hit movie, "Moonstruck," said this play is about friends and their sometimes amazing ability to help us see ourselves. It's also about our own ability to change and grow and learning to love. Tickets $7.
(810) 541-6430

OAKLAND UNIVERSITY
"Quilt, A Musical Celebration," opens 8 p.m. Fri., March 10 and runs for three consecutive weekends in the Varner Studio Theatre, on campus, Rochester.
(810) 370-3013

ENCORE
Deb Filler, "Punch Me in the Stomach," 8 p.m. Sat., March 11, 2 & 7 p.m. Sun., March 12, Jewish Community Center, DeRoy Theatre, 6600 W. Maple, W. Bloomfield.
(810) 661-1634

POPCORN PLAYERS
With Community House will present "Aladdin," 1 p.m. Sat. & Sun., March 18-19 and 4 p.m. Sun., March 19 at the Community House, 380 S. Bates St., Birmingham.*(810) 644-5832*

RIDGEDALE PLAYERS
"Mack & Mabel" opens 8 p.m. March 10 and runs weekends to March 26 at the playhouse, 205 W. Long Lake Road, Troy.
(810) 433-1572

ST. DUNSTAN'S THEATRE GUILD
"Love Letters" opens 8 p.m. March 10 and runs weekends to March 18, at the playhouse, 400 Lone Pine Road, Bloomfield Hills.
(810) 644-0527

AVON PLAYERS
"Lost in Yonkers" opens 8 p.m. March 10 and runs weekends to March 25, at the playhouse on Tienken Road, 1½ miles east of Rochester Road in Rochester Hills.
(810) 375-1390

Music

WAYNE RENAISSANCE CHORUS
Presents "Barbershop Tonight! Something Old, Something New, Something Borrowed," 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday, March 3-4, Mercy High School, 11 Mile Road at Middlebelt. Concert features the Shenanigans and The Real Deal. Call for tickets.
(313) 425-2727

SOUTHFIELD CIVIC CENTER
Irish Rovers, 8 p.m. Thurs., March 9. Cabaret-style seating. Tickets range from $20 to $18 per person.
(810) 354-4717

TUESDAY MUSICALS OF PONTIAC
Family Day Program, 3 p.m. Sun., March 12, Central United Methodist Church, 3882 Highland Road. Dance Dynamics Studio of Walled Lake will present the program. There is no charge.
(810) 673-7939

Restaurant Specials

Send items to be considered for publication to: Keely Wygonik, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150, or by fax (313)591-7279.

Menu changes

CITY GRILL
A lot of new things are cooking at City Grill, 725 S. Hunter, Blvd., Birmingham. Chef Ed Janos and his staff are introducing a new dinner menu tonight. A new lunch menu was introduced on Monday. There are some new appetizers and pasta dishes including grilled eggplant and brown rice lasagna, and Conchiglierte (small sea shell pasta) with Rock Shrimp, tomatoes, pea pods, garlic, cream, mushrooms and fresh tarragon. Sandwich offerings include a spicy black bean burger and grilled chicken breast and eggplant sandwich.
(810) 642-6900

Special events

KEY LARGO
Hollywood Premier Wine Tasting — "The Wines of Humphrey Bogart," 7:30 p.m. Wed., March 8 in the "Bogart Room." Cost is $29.95 per person.
(810) 669-1441

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