

DINING

Muskie's Urban Pier a lot of fun

BY JUDITH DONER BERNE
Special Writer

For Barbara Hickman, the recent transformation of Acadia into Muskie's Urban Pier means she has a restaurant to go to and certain customers at a minimum of four times a week.

"I eat here almost every day," said Hickman, interviewed in the parking lot as she headed back to work at her company, Pattern Guild and Products in Auburn Hills.

She not only likes the food — the Delmonico steak ("I'm very particular about my steak"), the burgers ("great"), salads ("wonderful") and rolls ("good") — but she likes the staff, they're very friendly.

Hickman, who lives in Clarkston, also wanted to talk about the desserts ("top notch"). Her particular favorite, Grandma Muskie's apple pie, is made with chunks of walnuts crust and warm caramel sauce (\$3.25).

"The place is a lot of fun." Although general manager Brian Russ and chef de cuisine Jeff Stefani weren't there to hear her, they would be excited.

Because "fun" is what they, partners Charles and Bruce Becker, and executive chef Brian Polcyn determined was lacking at Acadia.

"It wasn't that it wasn't a good restaurant," Clarkston resident Russ explained. "It was a little too ambitious for the area" which is attuned to events going on at The Palace of Auburn Hills just across the road.

Muskie's "is more of an every day type restaurant. Still, we tried not to lose people who liked Acadia. We wanted to be affordable and comfortable."

So since Muskie's opened in mid-August, prices are lower, portions larger and atmosphere, bolstered by lots of neon, is more casual.

"Hospital green" walls of Acadia have given way to earth tones, livened up by the wooden tables, and deer heads and mounted fish were installed to give it an "Up North, lodge-like feel," says Russ. The reworking from the original interior designer, Ron Rea.

Mounted TVs, billiard tables and the still-open kitchen give you lots to look at. And a more recognizable, more extensive menu — bar food, pizza, pasta, fresh fish and seafood and "Steaks n' Stuff" — invokes regional cooking from around the United States.

For instance, here's what chef Jeff, a product of the Oakland Community College culinary program, four years under two different chefs at Too Chez in Novi



Comfortable:
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JIM SIKORA/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

and a couple of years under Polcyn, might order.

To nibble on: Pepper-Jack Stuffed California Chile rolled in stone ground corn meal, roasted and served with black bean sauce (\$8.95) and "Detroit Style Chicken Wings that "are definitely not from Buffalo" (\$4.95).

For a light entree: Spicy Fusilli and Shrimp, large spiral spaghetti tossed with fresh chopped basil, feta cheese, black olives and Italian-style ham (\$8.95).

For a heavier entree: Either the Grilled Baby Back Ribs with smoked jalapeno BBQ sauce, half a slab (\$6.99), full (\$11.95) or the 14-ounce New York Strip, (\$17.95). By the way at lunch the ribs would be \$5.95 and \$9.95 and you'd have to settle for the 10-ounce Delmonico at \$8.85.

For dessert: It's the Strawberry

Tall Cake, that's billed as "too good to be called short." Fresh strawberries layered with yellow sponge cake, served with strawberry sauce and whipped cream (\$3.95).

But Leslie Boy of Lake Orion wouldn't be having any dessert. She said it was all she could do to make a significant dent in the multiple slices of meat loaf in BBQ gravy and swoop of mashed potatoes that came alongside (\$8.95).

"It's very good. It's just a lot," the first time diner said. She planned to take home the leftovers for another night's meal.

Children are made welcome. Muskie's "Guppy Menu" features a choice of four meals at \$2.99 including beverage; macaroni and cheese, chicken fingers with fries, "Lil Muskie Burger with fries and cheese pizza with or without pepperoni.

Muskie's Urban Pier

- WHERE: 3880 Lapeer Road (across from the Palace), Auburn Hills, (810) 373-7330
- HOURS: Lunch, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday-Friday; Dinner, 4-10 p.m. Monday-Thursday and 4 p.m. to midnight Friday-Saturday. Bar open weekends until 1 a.m. Open Sundays and extra hours when there is a Palace event.
- MENU: Casual American cuisine with many dishes wood-grilled. Vegetarian friendly. Children's menu.
- PRICE RANGE: Moderate.
- RESERVATIONS: None.
- CREDIT CARDS: All majors. Drinking and smoking: Sixteen mostly imported beers on tap. Bar is in smoking section, roughly a third of the restaurant.

RESTAURANT SPECIALS

Send items to be considered for publication to: Keely Wygonik, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 30251 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150, or by fax (313)591-7270.

New restaurants

Mona Lisa
New Italian restaurant 3832 N. Woodward, Royal Oak, formerly Oliverio's, well known by the Mona Lisa mural facing Woodward Avenue, has new owners, a new name, and new chef. Owner Hayabusa Barak and partner Ann Raneri have reinvented the restaurant and placed Chef Pino Urso at the helm. Urso was born in Sicily, Italy, and earned a culinary degree from Genova, Italy. He worked as a chef at Piacino in Troy. The grand opening is Nov. 7. Lunch served 11 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Monday-Friday, priced \$5.95-\$11.95. Dinner served daily beginning at 5 p.m. All diners will include soup or salad, pasta entree, bread with arrabbiato sauce and vegetable (\$10.95-\$10.95). The large bar area will host jazz entertainment Thursday-Saturday until 1:30 p.m. (810) 549-9000

Salas' Gourmet Mexican Restaurant
In the Walton Village Plaza (west of Squirrel Road), 3027 Walton Boulevard. Features healthy, gourmet, upscale Mexican fare made with fresh vegetables, skinless chicken breasts, lean beef and steak. Rice, refried and black beans made fresh daily. No lard used in the preparation of the food. Hours 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday-Thursday; 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Friday-Saturday; 3 p.m. Sunday. (810) 340-8881

Benefits

Vintage Wines
Detroit circa 1840 will come alive 6-10 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 2, on the lower level of the Detroit Historical Museum, 5401 Woodward Ave., when Harbortown Market hosts its annual wine tasting, "Vintage Wines in Vintage Detroit." Tickets \$20 at the door. Portion of proceeds benefit the Capuchin Soup Kitchen and Detroit Historical Museum. Sample wines, specialty cheeses and other gourmet foods. (313) 259-9400

Gourmet

Hosted by Crittenton Hospital 5-8 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 5, Troy Marriott Hotel. Guests will be treated to samples of appetizers, entrees and desserts from some of metro Detroit's finest restaurants. Tickets \$60 (Friend); \$125 (Patron); and \$175 (Benefactor). Proceeds will be used toward the purchase of heart monitors for Crittenton Hospital's Intermediate Cardiac Care Unit. (810) 552-5345

Applomb

Chef Louis Finnan, renowned for his New Orleans Creole cuisine, has found a new home at Norman's Eton Street Station, 245 S. Eton Street in Birmingham (corner of East Maple and Eton). Restaurant owners Norman and Bonnie LePage, Chef Louis and new general manager Dan Linnen are seeking to create a harmonious ambience between the menu, the surroundings, guests and staff. Fresh fish and seafood, steaks, pastas, salads, burgers and ribs will remain popular mainstays on Norman's menu. Look for daily specials, and gradual change with the "Big Bang" taking place around Mardi Gras time. (810) 647-7774

Events

Somerset Collection
WQRS presents Brunch with the Classics noon to 1:30 p.m. Sundays at the Somerset Collection Rotunda in Troy. Brunch prepared by Sebastian's Grill. Cost \$25 per person. Net proceeds benefit the Detroit Symphony Civic Orchestra. Call for reservations. (810) 643-7440

Golden Mushroom

Seven-course Asian Dinner with Wine, 6 p.m. Monday, Nov. 6, cost is \$75 per person. Call for reservations. (810) 550-4230

Key Largo

The Men of Key Largo in Walled Lake are presenting a Politically Incorrect Dinner, 7 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 9. Dinner will include cognac, selected wines, Cuban cigars, and special dinner, which features a prime 24 ounce Black Angus Strip Steak with mushrooms. Cost \$95 per person, dress casual, but elegant. Limited seating, call for reservations. (810) 360-0670 or (810) 609-1411

Unique Restaurant Corporation

Special feast celebrating California. The five course "earthquake of flavor" will be held at Trattoria Granchetta (Novi), (810) 305-5210. Nov. 8: America (Royal Oak) (810) 840-2000. Nov. 9: and Sebastian's Grill (Troy), (810) 649-6025, Nov. 11. Cost is \$36.95 per person, not including tax and gratuity. Call for reservations.

Menu Specials

Alexander the Great
Movie and dinner package, \$25.95 — includes dinner and movie for two, 34733 Warren, Westland. (313) 320-5410

College restaurants

Oakland Community College
Wassell Feast Thursday, Nov. 30. The college is at 27055 Orchard Lake Road, Farmington Hills. (810) 471-7780

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