

MONDAY, JANUARY 27, 1997

The Eccentric®

# TASTE

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## GUEST CHEF



STEVEN ALLEN

## Casual souper Sunday supper simply delicious

**W**hen I was approached to write a food article for the Observer & Eccentric, I gladly agreed. However, I did not want to limit the story by writing solely about recipes. Instead, I wanted to write about the entire dining experience. The setting, the mood, and the company all work together to create an atmosphere for enjoying the food, whether it's a simple sandwich or a seven-course dinner.

A good example of this was a cold, snowy Sunday recently at our home in Fenton. My wife Terri, seven-month-old daughter Sarah and I had recently moved into our new home, an old, remodeled farmhouse with six acres and a barn. Built around the turn of the century, it was called the Franklin Schoolhouse and as typical of the times, was one room with pine floors, a school bell and no running water. One hundred years later, its appearance has changed dramatically. In the 1930s the school was rolled down the road on pine timbers pulled by horses and reformed into a house. A large addition was built and plumbing and heating added. Still, the school bell was left intact. For us, it is now a comfortable home.

### Leisure time

The day we were expecting visits from several friends and family members to share our new home, have good conversation and watch a football game. My position as executive chef at the Golden Mushroom does not allow me a lot of leisure time, so days like these are cherished.

Since I have worked at the Mushroom for 14 years, it was natural for me to invite past and present work mates like Brian Polcyn, owner and chef of Five Lakes Grill in Milford; Chris Hessler of the Huntsman in Metamora; and Kevin Franter, John Adamski and Lorenzo Sprattling, all fellow Golden Mushroom employees. Also included were my brother and sister Sue and Tom and our new across-the-street neighbors, Stan and Alice.

With so many chef friends, the conversation naturally centered around food and cooking. We busied ourselves in the kitchen while the kids played outside in the snow.

We all cook elaborate meals at work so naturally we like to ease up a bit and make it simple when we are at home. On this particular day we also wanted something warm and satisfying.

### Hearty fare

A huge pot of chicken, pesto and potato gnocci Italian soup filled the bill. We accompanied this hearty fare with bruschetta, a traditional Italian garlic bread, topped with cured ham, bacon, olives and blue cheese. It was perfect for the day.

We just left the soup on the stove and ate it at our leisure, in between tractor rides for the kids and trips to the barn to see the new chickens. Guests arriving later simply helped themselves and the kids coming from the snow were instantly warmed.

Try it yourself the next time you have a casual get-together on a cold Sunday in Michigan. This recipe is wonderful for cross-country ski parties, after ice skating or any other outdoor winter activity.

### GNOCCHI (POTATO DUMPLINGS)

- 2 pounds baking (Idaho) potatoes; cooked, cooled, peeled and grated
- 2 cups semolina flour (can substitute all purpose flour)
- 1 whole egg
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon pepper

Place grated potatoes in a bowl. Add the rest of the ingredients and knead into a dough. Divide dough into six equal parts and place on a cutting board. Roll into 1/2-inch diameter cylinders and cut cylinders into 1-inch portions. Roll each into an oblong shape and gently pinch the side to make an indentation. Reserve gnocchi for soup.

*Tried under Master Chef Mike Cabello and as a finalist under Chef Michel Gaudin of Eugene's Le Patis. Steven Allen is the executive chef of the Golden Mushroom in Southfield, which is celebrating its 25th year.*

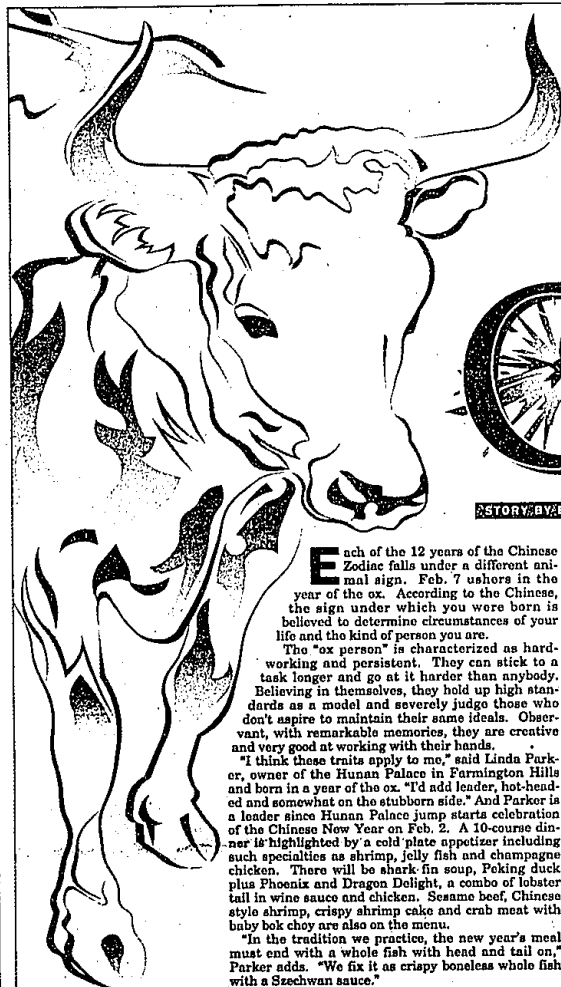
### LOOKING AHEAD

What to watch for in the next week:

■ Washington's new and views

■ U.S. and the world

■ U.S. and the world



TAMMIE GRAY/STAFF ARTIST

## The Year of the



STORY BY ELEANOR HEALD; SPECIAL WRITER

**E**ach of the 12 years of the Chinese Zodiac falls under a different animal sign. Feb. 7 ushers in the year of the ox. According to the Chinese, the sign under which you were born is believed to determine circumstances of your life and the kind of person you are.

The "ox person" is characterized as hard-working and persistent. They can stick to a task longer and go at it harder than anybody. Believing in themselves, they hold up high standards as a model and severely judge those who don't aspire to maintain their same ideals. Observant, with remarkable memories, they are creative and very good at working with their hands.

"I think these traits apply to me," said Linda Parker, owner of the Hunan Palace in Farmington Hills and born in a year of the ox. "I'd add leader, hot-headed and somewhat on the stubborn side." And Parker is a leader since Hunan Palace jump starts celebration of the Chinese New Year on Feb. 2. A 10-course dinner is highlighted by a cold plate appetizer including such specialties as shrimp, jelly fish and champagne chicken. There will be shark-fin soup, Peking duck plus Phoenix and Dragon Delight, a combo of lobster tail in wine sauce and chicken. Seamed beef, Chinese style shrimp, crispy shrimp cake and crab meat with baby bok choy are also on the menu.

"In the tradition we practice, the new year's meal must end with a whole fish with head and tail on," Parker adds. "We fix it as crispy boneless whole fish with a Szechuan sauce."

As entertainment, Hunan Palace will have the traditional lion dance accompanied by a demonstration of Gong Fu. Chen Oi Chin, executive director of the Chi-

nese American Educational and Cultural Center in Ann Arbor, explained the lion dance symbolism.

"The Chinese believe past misfortunes should be wiped out. The lion dance has a mission to ward off past evil spirits and bring in luck, prosperity and good health for the new year."

The lunar new year is the longest and most important Chinese festival. The foods used to celebrate are related to the diverse geographical areas that developed each cuisine. As people emigrated from China, they brought their regional cuisines and traditions with them.

"Chinese are gastronomic people," Marshall Chin, owner of Mon Jin Lau in Troy, said. "Whether it's to celebrate the new year, a birthday or anniversary, they eat out at a restaurant rather than cook at home. Chinese are also very superstitious and use symbols in decorations and foods. Oranges, as an example, represent prosperity. Lettuce or vegetables represents money. These enhance the new year's theme of good fortune and wealth."

Chen Oi Chin explained that a whole fish symbolizes the beginning and end. The word fish in Chinese sounds like the word abundant. Whole also symbolizes something perfect. Chicken, she says is a homonym with luck and that's why it is also included in the meal. Round is also perfect, therefore Chinese families prefer seating at round tables while celebrating with food.

Some Chinese carefully observing the new year's eve at home make supper a feast, with all family members coming together. One of the most popular courses stemming from regions in the north of China is steamed dumplings and a Mongolian hot pot. Dumplings in Chinese have the same sound as coin (money). The whole new year celebration is brought something of a climax 15 days later when the festival of the lanterns is observed. One typical food from southern China regions served then is another kind of dumpling made of sweet rice rolled into balls and stuffed with sweet filling.

"We also like to celebrate the new year ahead and welcome its coming," said Shen Yu, owner of New Peking Restaurant in Garden City. He offers special 12-course dinners beginning Feb. 3. Chinese cultural dancing will start the festivities followed by dinner, then a drawing for prizes.

See NEW YEAR, B3

### Chinese New Year Festival Dinners - Reservations essential

- Hunan Palace, 38250 W. 10 Mile Road, Farmington Hills • (810) 473-3939  
Feb. 2, 4 p.m., \$45 per person
- Mon Jin Lau, 1515 E. Maple Road (at Sepulchre), Troy • (810) 689-2332  
Feb. 10, 6 p.m., \$65 per person
- New Peking Restaurant, 29165 Ford Road, Garden City • (313) 425-2230  
Feb. 3-6, 6:30 p.m., \$28 per person, \$10 reservation deposit required
- Oceania Inn, 84 N. Adams Road (at Walton in Meadowbrook Mall), Rochester Hills • (810) 375-8200  
Special nine course gourmet dinner offered Feb. 5-9, \$14.95 per person, \$7 children 10 and under (Minimum four people, by reservation only). Also featuring traditional Lion Dance 7 p.m. Feb. 6-8, 6 p.m. Feb. 9.
- Shanghai, 6407 Orchard Lake Road, (at Maple in Orchard Mall) • (810) 626-5585  
Feb. 7-9, 5 p.m., \$35 per person (Entertainment offered Feb. 9 begins 4:30 p.m. with Lion Dance).  
Note: If you would like to learn more about Chinese culture, the Chinese New Year's Eve dinner is a great event. \$30 per person, hosted by the Chinese American Educational and Cultural Center. Host and hostesses will be present to explain more about symbols, cultural values and Chinese food.

### MAIN DISH MIRACLES

## Saucy shrimp will win your heart

**Editor's Note:** Muriel G. Wagner is a registered dietitian, and charter fellow of the American Dietetic Association. She received her master's degree and doctorate from Wayne State University and the University of Michigan. Wagner has practiced in Southfield since 1978, and recently started publishing a quarterly newsletter, "Eating Younger." Look for her column in *Taste* on the last Sunday of the month.

BY MURIEL G. WAGNER  
SPECIAL WRITER

When my patients saw the write-up in the Dec. 30 *Observer & Eccentric* about my newsletter, they asked what I meant by "Main Dish Miracles." Since I'll be writing a monthly column with that title, I thought that you too, would like to know where I'm coming from.

I grew up in a fat-friendly family. Mother prided herself on the taste of her food. I was brought up to appreciate food flavors and appearances. This helped to formulate my food perspective, which is "if it doesn't taste wonderful why bother making or eating it?" I call it my "Delicious Diet."

All of the recipes included in *Main Dish Miracles* have passed through three taste tests and are approved.

The first is my fat-educated palate. The second is my panel of super-tasters comprised of people who work with me on my newsletters. The third is my patients who provide insight into the appearance, taste and ease of preparation.

Main dishes in this column will be scrumptious, gorgeous, easy to prepare, and help you to "Eat Younger" painlessly. These are recipes that not only your family will enjoy, but also dishes that you will be proud to serve to company.

Though this recipe is for Shrimp Creole, any firm, white colored fish can be substituted (shrimp is not within your food repertoire? It's fresher, friendlier. After I defeat it, I sometimes like to add some chopped, fresh, plain tomatoes while I'm sweating it home. Fresh tomatoes are a burst of freshness in January.

If you've shied away from shrimp you may be missing out on a heart healthy treat. Unfortunately, shrimp has an undesired high cholesterol reputation. These ounces of shrimp have about half of the recommended cholesterol limit of 250 mg per day, and a little more than usual. But the fat and saturated fat are practically nonexistent. Saturated fat is about

three times more likely to raise your blood cholesterol than the cholesterol in your food.

Whether you choose shrimp, lean meat, skinned poultry or fish, portion control and low-fat preparation are keys to "Eating Younger." Six ounces a day (3 ounces each per lunch and dinner) are the recommended amounts that will keep your dietary fat and cholesterol within limits.

I developed the Creole recipe because the spicy sauce makes the three-ounce serving look much larger, especially when you add its natural partner — rice pilaf. Three ounces of medium shrimp, 12 to 16, is a lot more than I got in my last order from a local eatery.

Control the boat of the recipe by adding more or less hot sauce, according to taste. I like to add some fresh, chopped flat leaf parsley to the pilaf and serve the Creole with an interesting green salad mixed with sliced olives and walnuts. Try it for Valentine's Day or even Mardi Gras. The way to a man or woman's healthy heart is through their stomach.

To subscribe to "Eating Younger" send a check or money order for \$12.50 to Eating Younger, P.O. Box 60021, Pleasant Ridge, MI 48069.

### SHRIMP CREOLE

- 12 ounces medium shrimp, shelled and deveined
- 1 teaspoon butter
- 3/4 cup onion, coarsely chopped
- 3 ribs celery, coarsely chopped
- 1 green bell pepper, cored, seeded and coarsely chopped
- 3 cloves of garlic, finely minced
- 3 cups canned crushed tomatoes (28 ounce can)
- 1/4 teaspoon thyme
- 1 bay leaf
- Hot pepper sauce to taste
- 1/2 teaspoon grated lemon rind
- 1/4 teaspoon freshly ground pepper
- 2 tablespoons parsley, finely chopped
- 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice

Melt the butter in a saucepan. Add the onion. Cook, stirring until butter is melted. Add the celery, green pepper and garlic. Cook briefly, stirring. The vegetables must remain crisp.

Add the tomatoes, thyme, bay leaf, lemon rind, hot pepper sauce and pepper. Simmer 10 minutes, uncovered. Add shrimp to sauce.

Heat 3-5 minutes covered, not stirring. Add chopped parsley and lemon juice. Add more hot pepper sauce if desired. Serve over pilaf. Serves 4.

Nutrition facts: Calories 163, Total fat 17g, Saturated fat 0.3g, Cholesterol 165 mg, Sodium 14mg.