

DINING

Comfortable Oakland Grill gets wows for class act

BY ELEANOR AND RAY HEALD
SPECIAL WRITERS

With a modest opening mid-July, Oakland Grill has since garnered a host of fans. Going full tilt on Dream Cruise weekend last month, Oakland Grill, located in the former American location in the heart of primo Woodward Avenue real estate in Royal Oak, packed them in.

"Who owns this place?" a group of recent diners asked as they stepped in the main entrance, having discovered it on a trek up Woodward. "What was this before?" No, they hadn't heard of America nor Avenue Diner nor the Juke Box nor the Roman Gate, all former occupants of the site. "Wow, this is nice, let's see if we can get a table." They did and the last we saw of them, they were ordering a second round of appetizers having inhaled the first plates.

The owner is the gregarious and affable, Southfield resident Chef Louai Sharkas with a group of silent investors, who just happen to like great restaurant food and top-notch service.

"We did our marketing homework, before negotiating a long-term lease on the property," Sharkas said. He considers Oakland Grill's location the epicenter of premium dining. "For all practical purposes, four cities, Royal Oak, Birmingham, Troy and Bloomfield Hills nearly converge here," he added. "And when you think about it Southfield is not that far away. Besides, we've made ourselves visible to drivers on Woodward."

Sharkas knows the foodies he's



Comfortable class: The Oakland Grill is offering good food at reasonable price. Left to right, Michael Stewart, executive chef Louai Sharkas and John Roberts.

pitching to. He catered to them at the Townsend in Birmingham where he was the executive chef for five years. "Times have changed; people want comfort food. They want a place where they can drop in and get a great corned beef sandwich with chips

one night and on another order juicy New York Strip and a great bottle of cabernet sauvignon. They can get that here. Also, today's restaurant diner does not want to have to take out a loan to go to dinner."

The menu is ambitious includ-

Oakland Grill

Where: 4616 Woodward Ave., Royal Oak, (248) 548-7700.
Hours: Dinner Monday through Wednesday 5 p.m. to midnight and Thursday through Saturday until 1 a.m. Lunch 11 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Deck 4 p.m. to 2 a.m.

Menu: From fish to pastas with aged beef cuts, chops and baby back ribs in between. Fresh entree-size salads and sandwiches for lighter eating preferences plus chef's daily selections.

Cost: Appetizers \$4.50-10.50; entree salads \$9-12; sandwiches \$8-13; entrees \$12-26; and desserts average \$5.

Reservations: yes

Credit cards: all majors accepted.

ing as starters fresh chilled shellfish plus 10 appetizers from comfy potato pancakes with sour cream and applesauce \$4.50 to Ahi Tuna Sashimi with Japanese vegetable salad and sushi garnish \$9 or Pistachio Crusted Black Tiger Shrimp with Wasabi Sweet and Sour Sauce \$10.50. Four soups, plus a soup du jour are \$4 each. There are dinner salads plus exciting entree salads. Classic Caesar is dressed to perfection.

Seventeen entrees plus three daily fresh fish catch of the day at market price to different twists on ethnic foods. There's Sautéed Wiener Schnitzel \$24 and Chick-

en Pot Pie \$12.50. Feel like eating Asian? There's Grilled Chicken Breast Teriyaki with Stir Fried Rice. Italian? Go for Penne Pasta with Broccoli Rabe with caramelized garlic and anchovies \$11.75 or Lasagna Bolognese with grilled portobello mushrooms \$14 or Angel Hair Pasta with fresh chopped tomatoes, garlic and basil \$13.50.

Chop house style appeals? To satisfy, there's grilled dry-aged filet mignon or grilled New York Strip \$24 each or true comfort with Medallions of Beef Bourguignon with garlic mashed potatoes \$21 or a mammoth roasted pork chop with balsamic syrup, cabbage, apple and onion ragout \$15.50. In the mood for ribs? Two plates of tender, succulent, baby back ribs come with a generous side of cole slaw and French fries \$15.50.

When you see the giant banana at the entrance, you'll ask why. So, here it is, Chef Louai is a banana geek. Look at the desserts. White chocolate

banana cream pie and giant banana split. "I'm going to be doing more banana items including tableside Bananas Foster," Chef Louai remarked.

Designer Ron Rea has worked Chef Louai's banana into a creative atmosphere. He had his artists playing Michaelangelo on the ceilings. Lounge lizards will find the bar area with its high tables and high chairs a unique place to meet and eat. Main dining is white table cloth with fresh flowers, but there are a few booths along the wall.

The wine list, ambitious as the food, follows the latest trend in design. Rather than listing wines by varietal, they are listed from lightest to most full-bodied, making it easy to quickly order a bottle you'll enjoy. There's also a dozen thoughtfully chosen wines by the glass.

All in all, Oakland Grill is a class act where you will feel comfortable in business or casual dress.



Attracting crowds: The Oakland Grill has been drawing a following with its food and atmosphere.

RESTAURANT SPECIALS

Restaurant Specials features theme dinners, menu changes, and restaurant openings. Send news items to: Keely Wygonik, Entertainment Editor, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, Inc.,

36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150, or fax them to (313) 591-7279.

SPECIAL EVENTS

The Ritz-Carlton, Dearborn
Culinary tour of Germany, the third in a series of four tributes that comprise the 1997 International Journey of Food and Wine at the Ritz-Carlton, Dearborn, Sept. 7-14. The tribute includes German menu in the grill, wine

maker dinner 6:30 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 11, and wine tasting, 6 p.m. Friday, Sept. 12. Call (313) 441-2100 for reservations and information.

Mon Jin Lau

Kick off the fall season at Mon Jin Lau in Troy, and Merchant's Fine Wine, 6:30-8:30 p.m. Monday, Sept. 15. Wines for sampling, and Mon Jin Lau's excellent appetizers. Cost \$35 per person, call (248) 546-7770 or (313) 563-8700 for tickets and information.

Chili Cook Off

Al's Copper Mug is sponsoring its 11th annual Chili Cook Off noon to 10 p.m. Sunday, Sept. 14, 1704 W. Maple (corner of Decker Road) in Walled Lake. Features Rambling Country Band, beer,

hot dogs, Italian Sausage, Buffalo Burgers & Hamburgers cooked on the outside grill. Donation \$1, bring canned food, which will be donated to the Oakland County Food Bank. No one under 21 admitted. Call (248) 624-9559 for information.

SPECIAL DINNER

"Fire on Ice" Cigar and Dinner Extravaganza in honor of the Detroit Red Wings, 7 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 18, Vic's World Class Market, 42875 Grand River, Novi. Tickets \$97, portion of proceeds will be donated in the name of Vladimir Koznetsov and Sergei Mamonov to the William Beaumont Closed Head Injury Fund. Call (248) 305-7333, Ext. 126.

WHAT'S COOKING

BY ELEANOR AND RAY HEALD
SPECIAL WRITERS

Chef Keith Farnie of Birmingham's Forté is on the global food bent again, this time with a team of chefs from the restaurant. On Oct. 12, they will prepare and serve a Michigan Dinner in Shanghai, China to celebrate the opening of the Michigan Trade Office.

The dinner's mission is to create a forum whereby southeastern Michigan company executives can meet with about 80 influential Chinese leaders and government officials.

Farnie is no stranger to orchestrating such events having done something similar in 1989 in Paris for the 100th anniversary of French and American relations.

On Sunday, Sept. 14, at 5 p.m., the same Grand Style Buffet menu to be presented in China will be offered at Forté for \$75 per person. To defray signif-

icant costs, this and the dinner in China are being sponsored by Northwest Airlines, Ford Motor Co., General Motors and Progressive Tool & Industries Co. Individual local business sponsors are also involved as well as Michigan food suppliers.

In addition to a menu including Hartwick Sines Wild Turkey Meatloaf served with Yukon Gold mashed potatoes and apple-tomato chutney, Thorn Apple Valley Roasted Pork Tenderloin with BBQ cherry sauce, Lake Superior Smoked Whitefish served on dill whole wheat crostini and Pumpkin Ravioli with Leelanau Black Pepper Promenade Blanc Sauce, an array of Michigan wines will be available for tasting.

Alexander Zonjic and Ervin Monroe are featured instrumentalists during the festivities.

To reserve phone Deborah at Forté (248)584-7300. Dinner checks should be made payable to A Michigan Dinner in China.

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