

DINING

# Stir Crazy Cafe opens in Great Lakes Crossing

BY ELEANOR HEALD  
SPECIAL WRITER

With the speed that Italian restaurants opened in Metro-Detroit only a few years ago, Asian-influenced eateries are now sprouting up across the area.

The latest is Stir Crazy Cafe in District 6 at Great Lakes Crossing, Auburn Hills, that opened last Friday, April 16.

Since 1995, founder and president Gary Leff has successfully operated three Stir Crazy Cafes in the Chicago area. This is his inaugural in the highly competitive, moderately-priced eatery scene of southeastern Michigan.

Leff, a Northwestern University MBA grad, who worked as a management consultant for Fortune 500 companies, conceived the Stir Crazy idea during a trip to Asia in 1992. Attracted to the many healthy ingredients and clean, bold flavors of Asian cuisine, Leff redirected his career to that of entrepreneurial restaurateur.

He says he chose the Great Lakes Crossing location because "Auburn Hills is an up and coming area with strong demographics, but presently under serviced. Being near the 25-screen Star Theater complex is a great draw."

Location just inside the District 6 entrance is a big plus for diners who come to eat seriously-prepared food, but don't wish it complemented by entertainment and the amped-up atmosphere offered at other eateries in the heart of District 6.

Adding to its stellar reputation as the area's busiest restaurant designers, JPRA Architects of Farmington Hills and the Ron

## Stir Crazy Cafe

Where: Great Lakes Crossing, Auburn Hills, District 6 (off I-75 use either Joslyn Road or Baldwin Road South exits).  
Hours: Sunday-Thursday 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Friday and Saturday until 11 p.m.

Menu: Fresh, creative Pan-Asian with noodle and stir-fry dishes. Create-your-own or sit-down full service.  
Cost: Lunch \$7-10. Dinner \$8-14. Kid's menu, seven items \$4-5, including free dessert.  
Reservations: Call ahead seating.  
Credit cards: All majors accepted.

Rea team, have come up with another savvy plan offering plenty of visual stimulation, setting an Oriental mood. At a cost of \$1.5 million for the interior, soft maple wood stained a honey color, creates a glow sending your eyes upward to the lighting and the voluptuous silk fabric shades.

Stir Crazy's Crazy Buddha Bar with hammered iron wok torches, inspired by a wok and chopsticks motif, move your eyes to the large, gleaming exhibition kitchen with its four double wok stations. Wok cooks, under direction of Malaysian native and executive chef Wah Chew Boey, face diners creating their meal at the interactive food bar.

More eye candy on the walls — a bright "wok on the wild side" Oriental mural depicts among other activities, a colorful dragon opening chopsticks. Chinese characters printed in classical calligraphy read "Stir Crazy" meaning to those able to translate them.

In one word, Stir Crazy Cafe is "cool." Add that it offers fresh, high-quality food at reasonable prices in a fun, yet sophisticated environment, and you have a happening place before or after shopping or a film at the new Star Theater.

Best food deals at Stir Crazy are on the limited lunch menu, offered Monday to Friday from opening until 4:30 p.m. Prices then are 25 percent less than dinner, yet only downsized portion-wise by 10 percent.

If as Midwesterners, we're anything like Chicagoans, top appetizer selections will be Crispy Sesame Calamari served with a wasabi cocktail sauce, Coconut Shrimp with a sweet and sour tamarind dipping sauce and classic, crispy, delicate Vegetable Spring Rolls with Thai sweet and sour sauce.

Chinese Chicken Salad is number one in this department and among noodle dishes, favorites are Pad Thai with Shrimp and Crazy Chow Fun with Shrimp, loaded with pea pods, bean sprouts, mushrooms and onions in a black bean sauce.

Wok-Tossed Entrees and Specialty Plate winners include Kung Pao Chicken, Ginger Beef, Sesame Chicken and Asian Cajun Tuna.

Some selections are marked with one (spicy) or two (very spicy) chilis. As a reference point from one who likes Asian dishes kicked up, Stir Crazy very spicy is moderate compared to



Fired-up: General manager Andy York (left to right), and Chef Wah Chew Boey work with other chefs to prepare orders at the newly opened Stir Crazy Cafe.

## Thai spicy.

For those who like to move around, create-your-own stir-fry begins with all vegetarian at \$8. Depending on choice, chicken, beef, shrimp, fresh fish or calamari can be added for \$2 to \$3.50. Fill your bowl from the market bar, choose from two styles of rice and two types of

noodles, then add a sauce from the selection of a dozen.

Among desserts, overwhelming first choice is Famous Banana Wontons, deep-fried with white chocolate, vanilla ice cream, and caramel sauce.

A large selection of beverages and specialty drinks, including seven bottled Asian beers, are

available. Wine drinkers rejoice. Any wine on the small but crafty list is \$5 per glass or \$18 per bottle. Each wine comes with a suggested menu item.

Looking to the future and late 2000, owner Gary Leff hopes to have more Stir Crazy Cafes, one in Birmingham and the other in Novi.

## WHAT'S COOKING

Send items for consideration in What's Cooking to Kelly Wygonik, Entertainment Editor, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, Inc., 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150, fax (248) 591-7279, or e-mail kwygonik@ec.homecom.net

We're collecting information about Mother's Day brunches and special dinners. Send, fax or e-mail information about Mother's Day as soon as possible to Kelly Wygonik at the numbers listed above. Look for Mother's Day menu information in the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers on Thursday, April 29 and May 6.

## THE LARK

Chefs de Cuisine dinner 7 p.m. Monday or Tuesday, April 26 or April 27. Chef de Cuisine Marcus Height is given carte blanche to dazzle diners with his own personal cuisine. The cost is \$90 per person, not including extra beverages, tax or gratuity. A wine bouquet will be available at an attractive price. The restaurant is at 6430 Farmington Road, West Bloomfield. Call (248) 661-

4466 for more information.

## EMILY'S RESTAURANT

Springtime in Paris. Chef/owner Rick Halberg offers a menu concentrating on spring foods. French wines and a romantic mood — the next best thing to being in

Paris mid-week at his restaurant in Northville, 7 p.m. Wednesday, April 28. Call (248) 349-0505 for reservations and information.

## THE GOLDEN MUSHROOM

Five-course wine dinner with owner and winemaker Justin Baldwin of Justin Winery in California's Paso Robles appellation. Taste these superb wines matched to each course by Executive Chef Derin Moore, 6:30 p.m. Thursday, April 29. The cost is \$55 per person, call (248) 559-4230 for reservations.

## WINE TASTING

Thursday, May 13, 7-9 p.m. Napa Valley Wine Tasting to benefit J.P. McCarthy Foundation at The Kingsley Inn & Suites, 1475 North Wood-

ward, Bloomfield

Hills, \$50 per person. This is a Napa Valley Vintners Association 1999 tour stop. Among participating wineries are Anderson's Conn Valley, Benessere, Cosentino, Staglin, Robert Peotta, Silverado, Stonehedge, Turnbull Wineries, Duckhorn and William Hill. For tickets phone (248) 355-7575.

## P.F. CHANG'S CHINA BISTRO

Popular P.F. Chang's China Bistro in Somerset Collection South, Troy, does not take reservations, but has adopted "call ahead seating." Just give the restaurant a call (248) 816-8000 a half hour before you plan to arrive and if there's a wait list (which there will be on weekend evenings), your name will be added. Upon arrival, notify the host staff that you called ahead. When your name reaches the top of the list, you'll be seated at the next available table.

## UNIQUE RESTAURANT

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## OUTDOOR DINING

Big Rock Chop & Brew House, 248 S. Eton, (south of Maple) Birmingham (248) 647-7774; Paint Creek Creek Mill & Restaurant, 4480 Orion Road, Rochester (248) 651-8361 and the three East Side Mario locations 2273 Crooks Road (north-

east corner of M-59) Rochester Hills (248) 853-8622; 31630 Plymouth Road (west of Merriman) Livonia (734) 513-8803 and 29267 Southfield Road (between 12 and 13 Mile Roads) in the Southfield Commons Shopping Center (248) 569-9454 have officially opened their patios.

## INTERNATIONAL CAFE SERIES

Experience an evening of Middle Eastern Culture, 8 p.m. Friday, April 30 at the Southfield Pavilion, 28000 Evergreen Road, (between 10 and 11 Mile Roads), Chalmers dinner provided by La Fendi Middle Eastern Restaurant. The menu will include traditional Middle Eastern cuisine.

The Rafid el Afrah Band will perform traditional Middle Eastern dance music following dinner. Reservations are required in advance. The cost is \$20 per person. Tickets are available at the Southfield City Hall weekdays 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. or the Parks and Recreation Building 5-7 p.m.

weekday evenings. Call (248) 354-4854 for more information.

The International Cafe celebrations encourage cultural exchanges among the diverse ethnic groups in the Southfield community.

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