

Little Tree Sushi Bar expands offerings in fun atmosphere

BY ELEANOR HEALD
SPECIAL WRITER

Open for a year in its current, spacious Royal Oak Main Street location, Little Tree Sushi Bar was formerly squeezed into what is now Good Night Gracie's martini bar on Washington Street.

Back then, the menu was solely Japanese. Today, with expanded offerings, Little Tree headlines not only Japanese, but Thai and lesser-known (at least in this area) dishes from the Philippines. And of the tri-country cuisine, Filipino has been broadly embraced to the delightful surprise of president Lisa Rogoff and general manager Del Kernohan.

Offering good service in a fun atmosphere, Little Tree is a unique addition to the growing number of eateries along Main Street.

The ambience with straight wood-line design and plain walls is typical of a Japanese-style country home, designer/architect and builder Shephard Spencer noted.

Seating at booths, illuminated by Asian-looking Tiffany lamps, is intimately cozy.

Food is also served at the large bar area at the front and sushi at the sushi-bar in back. There, entertainment is watching skilled sushi chefs at work. Larger groups are comfortable at one of the tables corner floor with paper lantern globes bringing in ambient light.

Making you at home with his food is Filipino native Executive Chef Eddie Bautista, who learned his sushi-making skills from a master sushi chef in Seat-

Little Tree Sushi Bar

Where: 107 South Main St. (south of 11 Mile Road), Royal Oak, (248) 588-0994.
Open: 11:30 a.m. to 11 p.m. Monday-Thursday; until midnight Friday-Saturday; and 4:30-11 p.m. Sunday.
Menu: Pacific Rim cuisine including Japanese, Thai, and Filipino specialties, plus a broad selection of sushi which can be eaten at the 15-seat sushi bar or brought to your table. Many meatless selections.
Cost: Sushi \$1.50-3.50 for Nigiri and \$3.50-9 for rolls (6 pieces). Entrees \$9-14.
Reservations: Not accepted.
Credit cards: All majors accepted.
Details: Full-service bar. All items available as carry-out.

Little Tree Uncorked

- General Manager Del Kernohan suggests 1997 Zenato Pinot Grigio with mild Nigiri sushi.
- A 1997 Santa Rita Merlot, Chile, is best with spicy tuna or yellowtail and scallop sushi rolls.
- Among sakes, chilled Momokawa Bliver is a treat with chicken and beef dishes or Salmon Teriyaki.

tle, Washington. He impressed both Rogoff and Spencer at area Japanese restaurants such as Nipponki, Sho-Gun and Kyoto. They are delighted to have him on board directing the Little Tree kitchen.

Chef Eddie likes cooking Japanese because he says, "the whole philosophy of Japanese cuisine is that what a chef does comes from inside his person and that definitely shows on the plate."

Filipino is the food of his heritage.

"I like to present it edible to a diner's eye," he noted.

"For Thai foods, the challenge is apicing properly to make dish-

es flavorful, not just hot. I want diners to taste the natural blend of fresh ingredients."

Experience shows at Little Tree. Del Kernohan is a 1982 Oakland Community College culinary department grad. He honed his skills working for the C.A. Muer Corp., luxury resorts in Texas and at 220 in Birmingham where he was restaurant and kitchen manager. "But I really like working in the dining room with the guests," he said.

And what has Kernohan noticed diners like most from the eclectic menu?

Among the Nigiri sushi, it's tuna, yellowtail and Eel River "because they have great flavor, aren't too fishy and are a safe

first try." Experienced sushi eaters go for Sweet Raw Shrimp, Octopus and Surf Clam. But for a kicked-up treat, order Spicy Tuna roll with chili, garlic sauce. A Chef Eddie original is Crispy Roll with salmon, mackerel, and tuna, tempura battered then quick-fried.

Filipino dishes have their base in the cooking of Spain, since Spaniards once occupied the islands. Most popular among these entrees are Chicken & Pork Adobo, where the poultry and meat are simmered together with onion and Filipino seasonings to make a delicious stew. Giantang Seafood consists of shrimp, scallops, squid, and salmon sauteed with coconut milk, eggplant and garlic. Its attractive appearance is complemented by a delightful blend of flavors.

All Thai dishes can be spiced to preference, but most popular is the spicy Gang Gai, fresh eggplant, tender pea pods, bell peppers, baby corn, and shitake mushrooms seasoned with red curry and coconut milk, then stir-fried with choice of chicken, beef or pork; scallops, shrimp or squid. Pad Thai is the favorite noodle dish.

Among Japanese dishes, two appetizers are a must: Wasabi Shumai and Gyoza. Roasted Duck Breast with Asian Plum Sauce and Nabeyaki Udon, a noodle dish served in a hot pot are not-to-be-missed main dishes.

To leave a voice mail message for Eleanor Heald dial (734) 953-2047 on a touch-tone phone, mailbox 1864.



At your service: Little Tree Sushi Bar Executive Chef Eddie Bautista presents a variety of sushi selections including six vegetable rolls (right front). Behind the rolls is tutomaki. On the left (from back to right) are sashimi selections: tuna, salmon, yellowtail and mackerel. Salmon roe is pictured back left.

WHAT'S COOKING

Send items for consideration in *What's Cooking* to Keeley Wagonik, Entertainment Editor, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150. To fax, (734) 691-7279 or e-mail kwagonik@oe.homecomm.net

■ **Andiamo Italia West** — Strolling musicians during dinner hours 7-10 p.m. Sunday-Tuesday, Oct. 17-19; Thique performs light jazz and Motown, 7-10 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 21 at the restaurant, 6676 Telegraph, Bloomfield Hills (248) 865-9300.

■ **Five Lakes Grill**, 424 N. Main St., Milford (248) 684-7455 goes south of the border with a Mexican Fiesta, 6:30 p.m. Tuesday, Oct. 19. Following a margarita reception with appetizers, chef/proprietor Brian Polcyn will be cooking a five-course feast based on his Mexican heritage,

incorporating some of his mom's secret recipes. Dinner is \$45 per person plus tax and gratuity. Beverage packages including a beer or premium tequila sampler will be available at additional cost.

■ **Fifth anniversary dinner** at Emily's, 505 N. Center, Northville (248) 349-0505, 7 p.m. Wednesday Oct. 20. The cost is \$125.00 per person inclusive of tax and gratuity. Chef/proprietor Rick Halberg's dishes incorporating both black and white truffles will be accompanied by the wines of Labouré-Roi, French Burgundy and Bordeaux specialties.

■ **Holiday Wine & Food Tasting** to Benefit Coalition on Temporary Shelter, 7-9 p.m. Friday, Oct. 22 at Southfield Manor on Telegraph, just north of Ten Mile Road, in Southfield. Tickets

\$30 per person in advance; \$35 at the door.

Whole Foods Market and Merchant of Vino/Whole Foods Market will present their Top One Hundred Wines for 1999 plus an extensive selection of all-natural hors d'oeuvres and desserts prepared by Whole Foods Market's deli. Attendees will have an opportunity to sample wines and food while listening to the contemporary jazz sounds of Charged Particles. To charge tickets by phone, call (248) 433-3000.

■ **SoupCity** — Fund-raising

event for the Coalition on Temporary Shelter, 6-10 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 28 at the State Theater in Detroit. Thirty metro Detroit restaurants including Zoupi, Pike Street, Five Lakes Grill, and Union Street will prepare their signature soups and finger foods for the all-you-can-eat event. Cash bar, live music of Mud Puppy. Tickets are \$15 in advance, \$20 at the door. Call (248) 646-6666.

■ **French Bistro Dinner** — At the Lark restaurant, 6430 Farmington Road, West Bloomfield, 7 p.m. Monday and Tues-

day, Oct. 25-26. The cost is \$90 per person, not including tax or gratuity. Call (248) 661-4466. Last day for cancellation or reduction of reservations without charge is Oct. 16.

■ **Detroit International Wine Auction** — 18th annual event sponsored by General Motors, 6 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 30, Detroit Marriott Renaissance Center Ballroom. To launch this year's event, Tribute restaurant in Farmington Hills will host an intimate Winemaker Dinner 7 p.m. Friday, Oct. 29. Limited

seating available. Call (248) 664-7464 for ticket information.

■ **Gourmet Gala** — Presented by Crittenton Hospital, 5-8 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 7, Troy Marriott, 200 W. Big Beaver Road, Troy. Tickets \$75 (friend), \$125 (patron), \$175 (benefactor), call (248) 652-5345. Event features many of the area's finest chefs, restaurateurs and vintners. Proceeds will go toward the purchase of a handicapped-accessible passenger bus for the Older Persons' Commission.

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