

PRICE GOUGING

Cost of eating prime escalates as Y2K nears

BY ELIZABETH HEALD
SPECIAL WRITER

A new form of Y2K bug has hit restaurants. If your taste preferences lead to prime cuts of beef or top-of-the-line seafoods such as Alaskan king crab and lobster, you may be in for new millennium sticker shock at your favorite restaurant.

This spring, Alaskan King Crab was \$6 per pound at the wholesale level noted Matt Prentice, president of the Unique Restaurant Corporation, the area's largest restaurant group. It is now \$11. Forecasts for the wholesale price of warm water lobster tails in December are \$20 per pound. Today, cold water tails are \$29 per pound.

Two months ago, prime beef filets were \$16 per pound wholesale. Four weeks ago, it shot to \$21. This week it's almost \$30. Even prime New York strip steak has gone through the roof from \$9 per pound to \$16.62 whole-

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sale this week.

These costs are a full 50 percent above the peak holiday season last year.

"It's obscene," Prentice remarked.

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"Daily, the electronic and print media offer a millennium countdown," said Greg Coleman, proprietor of Café Bon Homme in Plymouth. "I think

this has generated a frenzy attitude. It's cascading down and suppliers are taking advantage by raising prices two months before the peak holiday season. They're cleaning up and restaurateurs are being manipulated.

"It's pathetic and catastrophic. We have no choice, but to pass costs along to diners. We've told suppliers that this is not tolerable and their attitude is 'that's the price.' We realize that when diners pay the bill, the restaurant appears to be overcharging, but we're at the mercy of suppliers. There is no viable alternative.

"The market could correct before the New Year, but we have no way of knowing. Right now, restaurants have to raise prices on prime beef cuts, veal, and seafood."

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



WHAT'S COOKING

Send items for consideration in *What's Cooking* to Kelly Wagonik, Entertainment Editor, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150. To fax, (734) 931-7279 or e-mail kwagonik@ec.homecomm.net

What's Cooking includes listings of new restaurants, special dinners, menu changes, restaurant anniversaries and renovations.

■ 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 with honorary guests Jean-Michel Cazes of Chateau Lynch-Bages, Bordeaux, France and Sotherby's auctioneers, Serant Sattelle and Michael Davis. Limited seating available. Call (248) 664-7464 for ticket information.

■ Red Wagon Wine Shoppe Millennium Wine Showcase at The Townsend Hotel — 100 Townsend Street, Birmingham, 7-9 p.m. Monday-Tuesday, Nov. 1-2. Tickets \$30 in advance, \$35 at the door if space available. Over 60 wines available for tasting including champagnes and a dynamic lineup of international white, red, and dessert wines accompanied by extraordinary buffet foods. Reservations with Brandon George at (248) 852-8307.

■ 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.

■ A Taste of Milk & Honey at Mores — 30100 Telegraph Road, Bingham Farms, (248) 642-1094, 7 p.m. Wednesday-Thursday, Nov. 3-4, \$34.95 per person. This five-course feast will acquaint diners with a sample of the dishes soon to be available at Matt Prentice's newest URC venue, Milk & Honey, debuting in Spring 2000 at the Jewish Community Center in West Bloomfield. While the meal is dairy, it will not be kosher.

When Milk & Honey opens, it will include a sushi bar, stir fry meals, a wok station, and an exhibition kitchen where diners can watch chefs perform culinary magic.

■ Save A Heart, A Celebration of Wine and Food, 6:30-9 p.m. Friday, Nov. 12 — at the Michigan League, 911 North University at Fletcher, Ann Arbor, to benefit the Michigan Congenital Heart Center at C.S. Mott Children's Hospital. Over 300 different wines will be available for tasting, accompanied by food from Ann Arbor's most popular restaurants. General admission tickets are \$50 per person (\$35 of which is tax deductible) and Tasting from Private Cellars benefactor tickets are \$180 (\$125 tax deductible). Call (734) 936-9134.

■ Epoch Restaurant Group's Millennium Celebration — Guests dining at any of four Epoch restaurants (Tribute, Farmington Hills; Forté, Birmingham; Too Chee, Novi; and Latitude, Bay Harbor) between now and Nov. 24 will receive an entry form each time they dine, or simply upon request. A random drawing on Nov. 30 will determine the winner of a six-

day gastronomic package for six beginning Dec. 28 and ending Jan. 2. The winner and guests will dine at each of Epoch's metro-area restaurants on successive evenings and be flown by private plane from Detroit to Harbor Springs on Dec. 31 for a new millennium celebration that includes two nights lodging in a three bedroom suite at the Inn at Bay Harbor and dinner at Latitude.

■ Chief Superstar comes to MotorCity Casino — Michael Russell, one of only two Certified Master Chefs still active in the Michigan restaurant business, has left the Bloomfield Open Hunt Club to take the position of Executive Chef of the yet-to-open MotorCity Casino in Detroit.

There he will oversee MotorCity's six food operations employing 300 food-service personnel, including 11 sous chefs and nearly 200 cooks — a far cry from the staff of 17 he headed at Bloomfield Open Hunt Club. Russell won't be pinned down on his food style except to say it's primarily American with Asian accents. His biggest challenge

will be at the casino's signature restaurant Iridescence, scheduled to open when MotorCity casino opens. Inaugural menu items include a dish such as rack of wild boar with cider-pepper glaze, braised red cabbage, root vegetable puree, cinnamon-glazed apples, and vanilla-scented sweet potato puree.

■ Andiamo Italia West — The Platters featuring vocalist Sonny Turner and Sam Butera perform Thursday-Saturday, Nov. 4-8 at the Andiamo Celebrity Showroom, 7056 E. 14 Mile Road, Warren. Tickets \$30-\$35, call (810) 288-3200.

■ The Michigan Grape & Wine Industry Council — is partnering with a number of Michigan restaurants and retailers in "Fall is a Cool Time for Michigan Wine." The promotion features Michigan wines in celebration of the harvest season and upcoming holidays. Participating Metro-Detroit restaurants include Big Rock Chop & Brew House and The Townsend Hotel, Birmingham; Ernesto's, Plymouth; Hogan's Restaurant, Bloomfield Hills; Nordstrom,

Troy; Tam O Shanter Country Club and El Nibble Nook in West Bloomfield.

■ Taste of the Arts — The Westland Chamber of Commerce is seeking restaurants to participate in the Taste of the Arts event scheduled 8 p.m. Tuesday, Nov. 30 at the Hellenic Culture Center on Joy Road near Church Hill High School. There is no charge for restaurants to participate. At least 600 guests are expected to attend, paying \$20 a person for the chance to sample the best of area restaurant food. Tickets will cost \$25 at the door if you wait until the day of the event. Participating restaurants will be able to pass out coupons and promotional materials at their tables.

The Taste festival will raise funds for the Chamber and for the Family Resource Center in Westland. A silent auction of art will also be held. A drawing will be held for prizes which include a trip for two to Las Vegas. Contact Lori Brist at the chamber office, (313) 326-7222 for tickets

or information on how to participate. Major sponsors are North Brothers Ford, the Hellenic Center, International Minute Press, Maui Travel and the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers.

■ American Harvest Restaurant — At Schoolcraft College, 18600 Haggerty (between Six and Seven Mile Roads) in Livonia is open for lunch Tuesday-Friday. The restaurant, operated by Schoolcraft College's renowned Culinary Arts Department, serves a variety of gourmet selections prepared and served by students who work under the supervision of four certified master chefs. Call (734) 462-4488 for reservations.

International dinners are offered Thursday evenings throughout the fall. Dinners are \$26.95 per person. Call (734) 462-4488 for information. The Professor's Pantry offers fresh bread, pastries, soups, pasta and salads prepared by students, 11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. Tuesday-Friday.

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