

DINING

Discover Vietnamese cuisine at peaceful Annam

BY RENEE SKEGGLUND
STAFF WRITER
rskeglund@ohiohome.com.net

Open just two months, Annam Restaurant Vietnamien on Michigan Avenue in Dearborn already has loyal customers. It's not surprising.

This quaint 48-seat restaurant that serves tantalizing Vietnamese food is simply lovely. The bare wood floor, ocre-colored walls, white linen tablecloths and rattan-backed chairs create an elegantly subdued atmosphere, a quiet Euro-Asian ambience. In fact, Annam literally means "peaceful self" in Vietnamese.

Ahh, then there's the food, a blend of many cultures, including Chinese, Japanese and French. The sampler appetizer platter arrived looking like the equivalent of edible art. And the "Tropical Delice with Shrimp," served in half a fresh pineapple, was almost too pretty to eat.

Infusion cooking

"It's very fresh, very light, a new Asian, or 'infusion,' cooking," said proprietor Andrew Nguyen. "A lot of people say our cuisine resembles French. I guess it's a French-Asian cuisine."

Perhaps the delight of eating at Annam is that the food cannot be defined as typically Asian. It's less spicy than Szechuan, less oily than many Chinese dishes and less foreign than Japanese sushi. Simply put, it's both famil-

A family effort

Proud of their good food are (standing left to right): Vanessa Ly, Tram Nguyen, Chef Hoa Mach and Andrew Nguyen. Seated: Phong Nguyen and Paige Anh Nguyen.



THE GARDEN PARTY

The St. Vincent and Sarah Fisher Center invites you to The Garden Party 1-6 p.m. Sunday, June 4 in the gardens of the St. Vincent and Sarah Fisher Center, 27400 W. 12 Mile Road, Farmington Hills. The event will feature enter-

tainment by Alexander Zonjic and Friends, samples of appetizers, entrees, and desserts prepared by 50 of metro Detroit's finest restaurants, samples of premium wines from Michigan distributors, and an auction of wines, trips and other items.

HOUSEHOLD PROBLEMS?
Tune-in Bob Allison's
Ask Your Neighbor
(WNZK 690 AM • Mon.-Fri. 9 am-11 am)
• How to Cook It
• How to Do It
• Where to Find It
www.1070askyourneighbor.com

24th Annual Livonia Art in the Village
June 10 and 11
Sat. 10-6 Sun. 10-5
Over 200 Exhibitors!
Free Children's Art Projects with "Arts & Crafts"
Variety of Food Vendors & Musical Entertainment
FREE ADMISSION • FREE SHUTTLE SERVICE • FREE PARKING
Don't miss the award-winning artwork on display in Greenmead's historic Village buildings
Greenmead Historical Village
8 Mile and Ashburn Road
THE LIVONIA ARTS COMMISSION
AMERICAN COMMUNITY MUTUAL INSURANCE CO.

Annam Restaurant Vietnamien
Where: 22053 Michigan Ave., Dearborn (between Mason and Monroe), (313) 565-8744, Fax (313) 565-8798.
Hours: Lunch, 11 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Monday-Friday; dinner, 5-9 p.m. Monday-Thursday and 5-11 p.m. Friday-Saturday.
Atmosphere: Quiet, subdued, sophisticated.
Menu: Uniquely Vietnamese, a blend of many cultures. Appetizers, salads, soups and noodles, vermicelli and rice, and main courses that include chicken, beef, pork and shrimp. Vegetarian friendly.
Prices: Appetizers \$5.50-\$6.50; salads and vegetables \$4-\$10; soups and noodles, \$7.50-\$10; main courses \$10.50-\$15.50.
Seating: 48, all non-smoking.
Reservations: Strongly recommended on week-ends.
Credit cards: All majors accepted.

Edible art: "Goi Dua Tom Thit," tropical delic served in half a fresh pineapple.

lar and exotic tasting at the same time.

Chef Hoa Mach rolls his plump spring rolls in rice paper and fills them with rice noodles, shrimp, pork, lettuce and fresh mint. And his crispy rolls with tamarind dipping sauce take on a whole new flavor when the second bite is enfolded in a fresh

mint leaf.

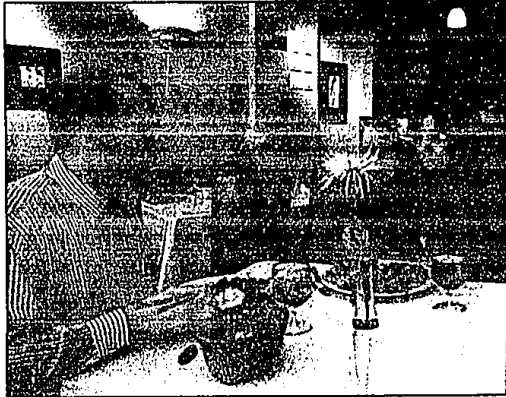
Several menu items — such as the "Com Toy Cam," rice cooked with perfumed mushrooms and chicken — are prepared in a clay pot, an essential tool in Vietnamese cooking. A clay pot focuses the heat and retains humidity. The result: No dry rice.

You may be surprised to find out that mint, basil and cilantro are the most commonly used herbs at Annam. Some dishes are flavored with curry, and many are accented with chopped peanuts or a peanut-based sauce. However, the herbs and other spices never dominate the food.

"The spices are used to enhance the taste, not overwhelm it," said Phong Nguyen, Andrew's sister, who manages the restaurant along with her brother's wife, My Anh.

Cooking family

The Nguyens are a cooking family. After leaving Vietnam with their parents in 1976, Phong and Andrew lived in



STAFF PHOTO BY TOM HARVEY

Paris, where Phong received a culinary pastry degree and worked in a number of restaurants. Their brother, Maurice, opened several traditional Vietnamese restaurants in Belgium. His "Gallerie" restaurants have been recommended in Fodor's Benelux travel guides.

It's not surprising then that Andrew, who works as an engineer in Dearborn, eventually opened a restaurant after he and Phong immigrated to the United States. "My whole family enjoys good food and company," he said. "All my relatives kept asking, 'Why don't you start a restaurant. Your food is wonderful!'"

When he found a property for sale (the former Nick-N-E's) on Michigan Avenue a few years ago, Andrew contacted Maurice and asked him to come out. Both brothers were quickly convinced that the central location, large workforce base and ethnic diversity of Dearborn and the surrounding areas would help ensure the restaurant's success.

So far, it has. Reservations are a must on weekends. Michael Schultz of Livonia and Sally Mrozinski of Dearborn shared a dessert called "Chui

Chien Me," fried bananas nestled in coconut milk and topped with a caramelized honey sauce, chopped peanuts and a sprinkling of sesame seeds.

"It's really good. The sesame seeds add to it," said Mrozinski. Schultz had preceded dessert with "Ga Nuong Mat," a honey-roasted chicken dish. "Delicious," he said. "It wasn't as spicy as other Asian foods. Everything was delicious, especially the sauce."

Even if you've tried Vietnamese fare before, Annam requires multiple visits — enough to sample the tiger shrimp in tamarind soup, the crystal vermicelli sautéed with crab meat, the chicken sautéed in An Nam sauce with curry and lemon grass, and the fried bananas for dessert. And when you've gone through the menu once, it's time to start over.

In Vietnam, people eat out all the time, said Phong: breakfast, lunch, afternoon snack, dinner, evening snack, and a before-bedtime snack. "And if you feel like a sweet thing, you can go out for a sweet," she added.

When asked what dish she would recommend to a first-

Lunch: Michael Schultz (left) of Livonia and Sally Mrozinski of Dearborn dined at Annam for the first time recently. Schultz enjoyed "Ga Nuong Mat," honey roasted chicken An Nam style. Mrozinski tried "Bim Xao Cua," crystal vermicelli sautéed with crab meat. They shared a dessert of fried bananas in honey and coconut milk.

timer, Phong said, "I wrote the menu. They're all my favorites. They're all coming from the heart."

Although they don't have a liquor license as yet, the Nguyens will gladly uncork and serve any wine that's brought in. They recommend the lighter whites and roses rather than the sturdier reds, like Merlot. Andrew, Phong and My Anh love Annam's smallness. It enables them to control the service and the quality. It also allows them to establish more personal relationships with their customers.

"Our customers are pleased with the service and the food, and that's why they keep coming back," said Andrew.

CARRYOUT SERVICE OR DINE IN
Bet and Jessie's
FISH & CHIPS
27206 GRAND RIVER
2 Ecks. E. of I-75
534-5550
2 LARGE PIECES OF FISH
from 6:00 PM Sat & Sun
21 PIECE SHRIMP BASKET
Free, Cool Sauce, Pot & Buns
Expires: 6/30/00 With Coupon
\$5.45

Tickets are \$150 per person, patron and benefactor tickets also available. Call (248) 826-7527, Ext. 3118. Participating restaurants include Carvers Steak and Chops, Diamond Jim Brady's Bistro, Cafe Cortina, Tribute, The Chex and the Michigan Star Clipper Dinner Train.

PRIME RIB DINNER
NOW EVERY TUESDAY & THURSDAY
DAVE The DJ
Formerly at Vickie's Steakhouse
None Appearing...
WITCH HOUSE'S
THE SHOWCASEMEN
FRI.-SAT.
OPEN DAILY MON-SAT AT 11:00 AM
BUSINESSMEN'S LUNCHES \$5.95
DINNERS from 4 p.m. \$6.95
21500 Schoolcraft in the Shoppes & Thel's Complex LIVONIA (734) 425-5520
AMPLE LIGHTED PARKING 50% HANDICAP FACILITIES AVAILABLE

MONTANA'S
Steak & Seafood House
MONDAY-THURSDAY SPECIALS!
10 OZ. PRIME RIB \$9.95
9 OZ. NY STRIP STEAK \$9.95
All Entrees Include: Salad, Bread, Choice of Potato and Soup Bar (with 6 Homemade Vegetables to Choose From)
We also...
10 pc. Jumbo FRIED SHRIMP and Great FILET MIGNON!
Catch SPORTING EVENTS on one of our 6 TV's! Open Daily at 4 p.m. and Sunday at 2 p.m.
Enjoy our FREE Soup Bar with all entrees!
34290 FORD RD. • WESTLAND (734) 728-7490

DETROIT SHOCK WHATEVER IT TAKES
Sat. June 3 • 7:15 PM
DETROIT SHOCK VS. SACRAMENTO MONARCHS
SEATS AS LOW AS \$5
• Games • Prizes • Face Painting
• Laser Light Spectacular • Meet-The-Team Autograph Session
TICKETS AVAILABLE AT THE PALACE BOX OFFICE OR CALL
248.377.0100
ALSO AVAILABLE AT FISHBOYTHEBAND
palacenet.com