

KITCHEN KAPERS



KEN ABRAMCZYK

Lent begins, so go fish up a few recipes

Many people will look at this week as the last week in February, and another step out of the winter drags as March begins.

But for Christians, this Wednesday, Ash Wednesday, marks the beginning of Lent, the 40 days before Easter.

Lent marks a time of abstinence, reflection, spiritual development and penance. The next 40 days represent another round of self-improvement for Christians.

Self-deprivation of a material good or activity, fasting and penance during Lent helps unite humanity with Christ. Fasting from meat on Fridays helps achieve that unity and understanding.

To share and promote Lent and help congregation members and parishioners achieve these ends, many churches schedule Friday fish fries, which also represent a great way for church members to meet other members at a social event and feel a sense of community. Elsewhere, restaurants often run seafood specials on Fridays, while many markets sell large quantities of fish at this time of year.

With meatless Fridays, it also marks a time when everyone can check out dishes, namely fish and vegetarian, that they may not try otherwise.

Have no fear

For some odd reason, some home cooks may be intimidated by fish and its preparation. But preparing fish really is incredibly simple.

Seafood can be expensive when compared to meat, but it has several advantages: it can be fixed quickly, the dishes carry several dimensions of tastes without a lot of fuss, and sauces can be complex, yet provide such a wonderful balance to the main course. More often than not, it is the course of choice when I enter a restaurant for the simple fact that I am fascinated with different chefs' interpretations of fish and the depths and dimensions of taste their dishes convey.

For a change of pace, try a different fillet over the next few weeks. There's always the relatively inexpensive cod available, but how about splurging and spend a few bucks more for monkfish, tuna or the always reliable salmon? Marinate the tuna in a mix of 1/2 cup of lime juice, a small bunch of cilantro and grind some fresh pepper on it. Cook the salmon with a similar mix, except use dill instead of the cilantro, or bake it in the oven with a dill-mustard butter or develop your own mix. Char it on a grill or pepper it up.

Devise your own sauce. What bases do you enjoy, such as a tomato, cream or mayonnaise? There's mustard-dill or tarragon sauce or traditional lemon (or lime) butter.

Color your world

Serve it with a ratatouille of eggplant, zucchini and tomatoes or a provencal sauce of shallots, garlic, tomatoes and oil. What great flavors and colors! You'll impress people, too. Get a few more minutes to spare? Then try that clam chowder or bouillabaisse, shrimp creole or seafood gumbo.

For a side dish, roast some peppers, then saute with a little thyme for a side dish with wild rice. Buy some fresh herbs and I think spring up those taste buds from the winter doldrums with a fruit salsa with pineapples and lime.

Go ahead. Experiment. Find that seafood recipe you saw several months ago or last week, the one that you read and thought, "Hey, I have to try it some time." Jump on the Internet, or try one of the recipes inside today's Taste section.

In the spirit of Mardi Gras, I've revised a Paul Prudhomme recipe for Shrimp Creole from his Louisiana Kitchen cookbook and included two others of my favorites. Enjoy!

Ken Abramczyk is the Taste editor for the Observer Newspapers. He can be reached at (734) 953-2112.

LOOKING AHEAD

What to watch for in Taste next week:

- Irish dishes
- Chili cookbook

6TH ANNUAL Extravaganza



STAFF PHOTOS BY BILL BREZNER

A nice touch: Chef Jeffrey Hoffa of Cafe Cortina in Farmington Hills perfects his Herb Risotto with Truffle Oil and Frico. Hoffa will serve the dish at the Michigan Culinary Food & Wine Extravaganza on Wednesday.

BY NICOLE STAFFORD
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Bourbon-Fired Cajun Shrimp with a Chicory Salad and Grilled Andouille Etouffee—that's the creation Chef Randy Emert of Southfield's Golden Mushroom is fine-tuning. Herb Risotto with Truffle Oil and Frico—that's the dish Chef Jeffrey Hoffa at Cafe Cortina in Farmington Hills is perfecting.

Emert, Hoffa and more than a dozen metropolitan Detroit chefs are testing the limits of their culinary genius in hopes of impressing the judges at the Sixth Annual Michigan Culinary Food & Wine Extravaganza, a competition event that's open to the public. As if the edibles—creations by some of the area's most renowned chefs representing more than 20 restaurants—weren't enough to draw food fanciers, proceeds from the event advance culinary excellence in Michigan.

"It's giving back to the culinary field and

supporting new talent," Emert said.

Slated 7-9 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 28 at the Andiamo Banquet Center in Warren, the event supports two efforts: the Michigan Culinary Team, which competes every four years at the World Culinary Art Salon in Germany (the culinary equivalent of the Olympics) and a scholarship fund for local culinary students.

And competitions like the World Culinary Salon have a tremendous impact on metropolitan Detroit's food scene, said Emert, one of four chefs on the 1996 Michigan team. Emert also was the team's captain.

"It's amazing just to see what other chefs come up with," said Emert. "It's just an incredible experience."

Since about 1,700 chefs from around the world participate, the exposure is monumental, he said, recalling that when he returned from the international competition, "I felt like I could do anything."

And such confidence, coupled with exposure to chefs from so many different cultures, translates into dishes with new influences and creativity without boundaries.

In other words, those who love to dine out in metropolitan Detroit can think of the Michigan Extravaganza as an investment in the future of

Food event supports best chefs, new talent



All dressed up: The risotto creates a colorful dish warmed by the ambience of the fireplace at Cafe Cortina.

their own culinary experiences.

Participation in international competitions also showcases Michigan's culinary talent, said Cafe Cortina owner Adriano Tonn. "And that's very important, to bring that international recognition to Michigan and help these young chefs get their names out there."

The Michigan Culinary Extravaganza was conceived in 1995 by Roger Petri, director of operations at Mac & Ray's restaurant, and Judy Dunn, president of Decanter Imports. Petri and Dunn wanted to bring together several area restaurants for a culinary tasting event that included both food

Please see EXTRAVAGANZA, D2

Don't dye beer green, substitute a shamrock



DEAN JONES

Though it's still a few weeks away, there's already the humming of St. Patrick's Day party planning out there. As is the tradition every year, we'll be celebrating the day when "Everybody is Irish" on Saturday, March 17.

St. Patrick's Day is an Irish holiday honoring Saint Patrick, but I was astounded to learn that he was NOT actually Irish! The missionary credited with converting the Irish people to Christianity in the fifth century was a slave kidnapped from Britain by Irish marauders and put to work as a herdsman.

Spreading the word

During his captivity he experienced religious visions and, after his escape, became an ordained minister. Saint Patrick returned to Ireland to spread the Christian word, using a shamrock to explain the Trinity (The Father, The Son, and The Holy Ghost).

According to legend, Saint Patrick

drove all of the snakes from Ireland into the sea, but the legend possibly symbolizes the fact that he drove paganism out of Ireland. He died on March 17, 461 A.D., and the anniversary of his death is commemorated as St. Patrick's Day.

The Irish holiday was first celebrated publicly in America in 1737 in Boston, Mass. Green is the national color of Ireland, and the "Wearing of the Green" has become a way for people all over the world to connect with Ireland and its celebration.

In America, we never seem to miss an opportunity to throw a party. On St. Patrick's Day, the slogan "Everybody is Irish" gives all of us a reason to celebrate. Green beer, as we know it today, was derived from the old custom of "drowning the shamrock."

After the St. Patrick's Day parades, men would go to the pubs and drop a shamrock into a glass of whiskey or beer and drink it down, including the shamrock!

Gathering at the pub

The pub has long been a gathering place for friends and neighbors to enjoy each other's company throughout the year. Meet a friend for lunch

and order a "Black and Tan" (Irish Stout and Pale Ale) with your meal and feast in a piece of tradition. Let your palate savor what the world survived on long before there was cheap wine and fast food.

If you can't get out for a traditional celebration, see the recipe below to make your own St. Patrick's Day feast. Just make sure to stop by your local pub on the way home for your Growler of fresh stout and pale ale to celebrate St. Patrick's Day ... but please do NOT turn your beer green! If the Brewmaster wanted the beer to be green, he would have made it that way! I will, however, advocate the addition of a shamrock to your handcrafted brew ... just for luck!

An old Irish saying:
Rye bread will do you good,
Barley bread will do you no harm,
Wheat bread will sweeten the blood,
Beer & Oaten bread will strengthen the arm.
As always, never trust a skinny Brewmaster

Dean Jones is Brewmaster at the Big Rock Chop House, located at 248 S. Bton in Birmingham.



What's Cookin' at your house?

Do you have a dish that you absolutely enjoy preparing for yourself, family members or friends?

Everyone knows the best recipes are the ones you share. Send us your favorite original recipe, and if it's chosen to be featured in the Recipe to Share feature in Taste, we'll send you a cookbook.

Send recipes for consideration in Recipe to Share to Ken Abramczyk, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150, or fax them to (734) 591-7279, or e-mail kabramczyk@oe.hometowncomm.net.

Please include a daytime phone number and the best time to call, so we can contact you about your recipe. Try to be specific with recipe details such as can and package sizes.