

DINING OUT

New Milk & Honey highlights vegetarian and kosher

BY ELEANOR HEALD
SPECIAL WRITER

Matt Prentice's Unique Restaurant Corporation (URC) has catered at the Jewish Community Center in West Bloomfield for two years. Milk & Honey, metro-Detroit's 14th URC restaurant, opened in late February, was a natural progression, two years in the making. It is the first and only gourmet vegetarian, dairy kosher restaurant in the U.S., owned and operated by a multi-concept independent operator.

A Milk & Honey diner steps into an ultra-modern, non-smoking setting for 90 with full-service gran-

ite-topped bar. Attractive, clean lines are accented by slate, rich cherry wood, and chrome.

"Vegetarians will be jazzed here," said URC's owner Matt Prentice. But, why would he try his hand at vegetarian in a venue with strict Jewish dietary laws? "I'm not Jewish," Prentice said. "But my wife is. Her grandmother was orthodox. Religion has always been a point of interest for me. From my first deli in a Jewish neighborhood, the Jewish community has supported me. You might call Milk & Honey a return favor for support."

URC's Corporate Executive Chef Jim Barnett cited the growing

interest among area diners to eat vegetarian, kosher or not. "For the past three years, we've had a twice yearly Vegetarian Feast at Morels," he noted. "Each year, it grew more popular and served as the inspiration for some dishes on the new Milk & Honey menu."

Prentice added that most kosher caterers are very traditional. He does not believe it has to be that way even though the strictest observance of kashrus (keeping kosher) will be practiced for all food preparation at Milk & Honey, in the private dining rooms and for take-out.

Although Milk & Honey is a dairy restaurant, dairy products used as cooking ingredients observe the highest level of dairy kosher, called "Cholov Yisroel." Cows utilized for such dairy products are raised naturally without steroids. Cholov Yisroel products cost about twice that of traditional dairy. Yet, many non-dairy dishes on the Milk & Honey menu are vegan-friendly or can be made that way upon request.

Culinary challenges

Barnett conceived a menu offering culinary challenges and is what he calls "prep intensive." Chef Eric Molner, who has cooked at URC's Northern Lakes Seafood in Bloomfield Hills and Duet in Detroit, helped develop Barnett's menu concepts and will be the property chef. "He's an exacting technician," Barnett said.

To create very healthy kosher dishes with intense flavors, Barnett purchased a high-tech vegetable extractor to make what he calls "paints." Both beet and horseradish, and carrot and ginger "paints," are vibrantly-colored vegetable extracts with natural sweetness and intense, fresh flavors. Not only do they create attractive plates, but build depth and layers of flavors for the dish. The vegetarian Mustard Marinaded Grilled Vegetables with curried cous cous and beet and carrot points is an example of the creative use of vegetable extracts. Seared Ahi Tuna with leek and artichoke fondue, celery whipped potatoes and ginger-carrot sauce is another.



New creations: Milk & Honey Executive Chef Eric Molner sits at a table holding a portabella wellington dish with a smoked salmon and sweet potato tortilla on the table with a chocolate pot de creme dessert.

Milk & Honey

Where: 6600 West Maple Road (at the Jewish Community Center), West Bloomfield, (248) 661-2327.

Open: Monday-Friday, continental breakfast 8-11 a.m.; lunch 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday-Thursday dinner 5-9 p.m. Sunday brunch 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Sunday dinner 4-9 p.m.

Menu: Vegetarian (many vegan friendly) and fresh fish specialties incorporate global cooking styles. Food preparation maintains strictest observance of Jewish dietary laws. Full bar service with kosher wines.

Cost: Dinners under \$20. Most lunch items under \$10. Kid's menu \$4.6.

Reservations: Accepted for parties of six or more

Housemade Potato Gnocchi uses a gnocchi recipe from renowned chef Alain Ducasse, with a distinct URC spin. Gnocchi are sauteed with oven-roasted tomatoes, olives, artichokes, leeks, basil and feta cheese. Mushrooms are an essential ingredient for flavor depth. In vegetarian cooking, they substitute a "beef" flavor. Grilled Portabella Mushrooms with roast-

ed garlic, port wine-balsamic reduction and crisp shallots is a tasty appetizer example. Barnett's favorite Quenelles of Pike with corn and zucchini succotash with morel mushroom fumet is another good illustration.

Milk & Honey Salad with spring greens, roasted hore pear, grilled red onion, crista's teardrop tomatoes and pincenuts

has a "killer" honey-maple mustard dressing in Barnett's opinion.

Among fish dishes are two traditional comfort preparations: Pot to Crusted Whitefish and Sautéed Perch. A favorite from URC's Morel Feast is Walleye Wellington.

End a meal with a dessert selection. If you like chocolate, don't hesitate, order the Calibaut (French chocolate) Pot de Creme.

Consider Milk & Honey as "a great restaurant that just happens to be kosher." The new, dynamic concept emphasizes that kosher vegetarian and top-flight dining are not mutually exclusive.

Eleanor Heald is a Troy resident who writes about dining, food, wine and spirits for the Observer & Eccentric! Newspapers. To leave her a voice mail message, dial (734) 953-2047 on a touch-tone phone, mailbox 18648.

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