

Go west
Grand Rapids
offers plenty to
see, do, & B6



Side dish

Holiday treat

Popcorn balls originated in the 1800s as a holiday tradition used to decorate Victorian mantels and Christmas trees. They were flavored with orange juice, peppermint or molasses. The American Pop Corn Company is hoping to renew interest in this old-time favorite with the Jolly Time Pop Corn Ball Maker.

The maker consists of two red plastic spheres with a plastic handle on each end. It costs \$1.50 and can be purchased online at www.jolly-time.com. When making popcorn, remember that two tablespoons of kernels make about four cups of popped corn. To create popcorn balls, make about 10 cups of popcorn in a 4-quart glass bowl, microwave 1/3 cup butter or margarine on high until melted, about 45 seconds. Stir in 2/3 cup firmly-packed brown sugar and 1/3 cup light corn syrup. Microwave on high until mixture boils, 1 to 3 minutes, stirring once. Microwave on high 2 1/2 to 3 minutes without stirring. Stir in 1/4 teaspoon baking soda and a 1/2 teaspoon vanilla; stir in popped popcorn, mixing well. Microwave on 70 percent power 1 minute more. Remove and stir to coat popcorn evenly. Turn mixture out onto cookie sheet just until cool enough to handle. To make balls, place 1 cup mixture in Jolly Time Pop Corn Ball Maker, or in the center of a 10-inch square of plastic wrap. Shape into balls. Twist wrap and tie securely. Makes about 8-10 popcorn balls.

Summer in winter

The weather outside may be frightful, but inside it can be delightful with hot spices. Frank's RedHot offers the following spicy sandwich recipe.

SPIRAL SANDWICH RECIPE

- 5 ounces to 1/2 cup (one-half cup) garlic and herb cheese spread at room temperature
- 3 tablespoons finely chopped pimientos, well drained
- 2 tablespoons Frank's RedHot Cayenne Pepper sauce
- 6 8-inch flour tortillas
- 1/2 cup watercress or fresh cilantro, washed and finely chopped
- 8 ounces thinly sliced turkey
- 4 ounces thinly sliced



Muenster cheese 1/2 small red onion, very thinly sliced. Beat cheese spread, pimientos and Frank's sauce in medium bowl until smooth. Spread rounded tablespoons mixture onto each tortilla.

PLEASE SEE MAIL, B2



Frank Agostini of E.G. Nick's toasts the holiday season. He encourages people to use their imagination to create a festive setting for Christmas brunch. For example, platters of food are arranged on different levels to create depth. A gold basket, filled with breakfast pastries, is decorated with ribbon, sparkly candles, garland and bright red poinsettias enhance the presentation.

Eat, drink and be merry

BY KEELY KALESKI
STAFF WRITER

See recipes inside.
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Holiday celebrations don't have to be about dinner. If you serve brunch, you and your family can relax and enjoy the rest of the day. "Being together with family is what's important," said Frank Agostini, corporate chef and director of catering for E.G. Nick's, and part owner of E.G. Nick's of Plymouth. He will be preparing Christmas brunch for his immediate family which numbers 25 to 30 people. "Brunch is more relaxed, it's eclectic, you can incorporate breakfast, lunch and dinner foods. Not everyone likes turkey or ham; this way you give a lot of variety, and you've pleased a lot of people." Although he's a chef, Agostini, who is married and has two children,

doesn't prepare everything himself. To illustrate how easy Christmas brunch can be, Agostini put his imagination to work, and set the scene for a festive holiday gathering in the dining room at E.G. Nick's in West Bloomfield. "You don't have to spend all of your time in the kitchen, there are so many good bakers. It's a holiday. Think about your family, you've entertained them several times at your house. What do they like? We always have shrimp cocktail on our buffet table for my father-in-law. Think of all the things you like to eat when you go to a party. Think about the dishes you order at your favorite restaurant. Mix

what you do with what they do. The whole thing comes down to planning. Use the best people for the best things." Jackie Scher of Scher Delites in Southfield is his chocolatier. "She does a great job, and makes all my cakes," said Agostini pointing to a chocolate cake with a white chocolate ribbon. Jim Payne, who owns the Great Harvest Bread, Co. on Maple Road in Commerce Township, made the caramel apple crunch bread, scones, Danish, and muffins. Try to think of the ordinary in extraordinary ways. One of Agostini's favorite brunch dishes is blueberry French toast. Mix a little blueberry pie filling with fresh blueberries or blueberry preserves and spread it on a piece of bread. Top with another piece of bread, dip in



An easy way of carrying your food to your seat, or to eat on your lap, tableware placed inside a decorated gift box.

egg/milk mixture, and fry both sides until golden brown. "It's like having blueberry pancakes," he said. "Or use cinnamon swirl bread to make French toast instead of plain white bread." Make a breakfast strata with scrambled eggs, your choice of cheese, chopped mushrooms, green peppers, onion, and shredded hash browns. Place in a casserole dish and bake until set.

Order entrees and salads from your favorite restaurant. "There are a lot of great independent restaurants that will take the time and put forth the effort to work with you and make sure it's nice for you to take home," said Agostini. "Order sweet and sour chicken from your favorite Chinese restaurant, or Chicken Marsala from an Italian.

PLEASE SEE CELEBRATION, B2

Heighten your guest's senses with an elegant buffet table

BY KEELY KALESKI
STAFF WRITER

Ruby Red Poinsettias tower over a buffet table filled with festive holiday fare. Flickers of light from red, sparkly votive candles bounce off a tall crystal bowl of fresh fruit, and a gold wicker basket overflows with freshly baked muffins and Danish. "If I had laid all the food on the table at the same level it wouldn't have the same affect," said Frank Agostini, corporate chef and director of catering for E.G. Nick's, and part owner of E.G. Nick's of Plymouth.

"It doesn't have any oomph!" Presentation is important; after all, we eat with our eyes and hunger for foods that look and taste good.

"It's all about little touches and creating different heights," said Agostini. "Use what you've got. Mirrors give you depth; whatever you put on top looks double the size. Fan individually wrapped chocolates out on the table, go to Home Depot and buy glass block

PLEASE SEE TABLE, B2

Ancient traditions create champagne with finesse

More than with any other wine, champagne drinkers are brand loyal. And that's OK. However, wine drinkers today are on a bent to experience new tastes. This holiday season, drink your favorite champagne but try Besserat de Bellefon, a new one that was introduced into Michigan only a few months ago. While new to our market, the House of Besserat de Bellefon was founded in the Champagne region of France in 1843 by Edmond Besserat, a native of Hautvillers. That's worth mentioning since Dom Perignon, credited with developing champagne, was cellar master at the Benedictine Abbey of Hautvillers.



Focus on Wine
Ray & Eleanor Heald

Over the years, Edmond Besserat also became a master winemaker in Champagne. After him, grandsons Victor and Edmond continued to expand the reputation of Besserat champagnes. In 1927, when Edmond married Yvonne de Merle de Bellefon, a member of the Champagne region aristocracy, the name Besserat de Bellefon was born.

Ray & Eleanor pick the best champagnes.
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INFUSING ELEGANCE

In 1930, following a request from a Paris restaurateur, Victor Besserat launched a new sparkling winemaking technique that created a slightly sparkling champagne with minimal froth and an abundance of finesse that made Besserat de Bellefon ideal to accompany food.

Crement was once the official French term used to identify a slightly sparkling wine with a

reduced dosage, which lowers the "bubble" pressure. Crement champagne is stylistically bubbly, yet the bubbles break more softly in the mouth than a traditional Brut. When the term crement was officially dropped from French labeling, the Besserat de Bellefon champagnes were redesignated Cuvee des Moines, translated as Blend of the Monks. The name honors the Benedictine monks of Hautviller who pioneered champagne development.

BESSERAT DE BELLEFON

All three Cuvee des Moines champagnes are non-vintage. Some Americans believe that a

vintage champagne is better than a non-vintage. It's not. In fact, the non-vintage (NV) Brut sets the style from every prestigious champagne house. Making the Brut taste similar every year is the art of blending champagne.

Additionally, to retain crispness — so necessary as a food accompaniment — and to craft a creaminess on the palate, Besserat de Bellefon Cuvee des Moines champagnes do not undergo malolactic fermentation.

Besserat de Bellefon, Cuvee des Moines Brut \$35 with a slight toasty character is deli-

PLEASE SEE HEADS, B2

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