

**MARCOS**

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couple years." Recently, he's been heartened by the loyalty of customers who refuse to let Conte walk out of the community. "The response we've gotten from customers is, 'You can't leave because you are part of the family.' They get very sentimental. It's a hard thing."

He'd like a larger restaurant which can seat about 125 people, on a busier street.

"The perfect location would be right in the center of Farmington Hills in the 12 Mile corridor," Conte said.

It could be a few months before any transition takes place, he said, and employees will have the option to come back.

"We have a letter going out this week," Conte said. "All of our parties will, of course, get a refund on their deposit."

Deposits are \$100 for lunch parties; \$200 for dinner parties.

He also worked out arrangements for customers at some other restaurants like Cafe Cortina, his aunt, Rina Tonon's restaurant, and Italian Epicure in Novi.

About 20 parties, mostly bridal showers, need to be rescheduled. He said customers' deposits will be coming back to them very shortly.

**SPECIAL RECIPES**

Through the years, Marco created special recipes like cherry-honey nut chicken, a bestseller; done with chicken breasts, Michigan sundried cherries and Frangelico liqueur.

"We developed it at Hudson's at least 12 years ago when Hudson's was around," Conte said. "They wanted me to make something different. We do a lot of fundraisers where we go and cook and do cooking demonstrations. You get to meet a lot of people."

He reminisced about special parties, remembering Miki and Mike Hinds' wedding. "Miki's a florist and she did the entire restaurant," Conte said. "We had thousands of dollars in flowers everywhere in the restaurant."

"Another memorable party was one given by Fred Timper, a Michigan Association of Police representative, for his wife Judy, a court administrator for 17th

District Court in Redford Township. It was a surprise 25th wedding anniversary party several years ago.

"We renewed our wedding vows at the restaurant," Fred Timper said. "He even had a wedding cake for us. He makes memories."

Conte catered their daughters' graduation parties and Fred's business parties. His style brings a lot of repeat business.

"We've done 10 bridal showers for one group of friends," Conte said.

But customer loyalty has been no match for the rising costs of doing business.

"The operation expense of a restaurant has gone up in the last couple of years," Conte said.

"We aren't making as much money as we used to. People aren't spending as much money as they used to with all that's going on in the world between war, stocks and layoffs."

He has high praise for his 20 employees, whom he describes as very loyal.

"I have an incredible staff," he said. "They are all sticking it out to the end. Some have been there since the restaurant opened."

Conte started Marco's when he was 24. His parents owned Rina's, an Italian family-style restaurant which also served pizza at Fenkell and Schaefer in Detroit.

Conte has a photo of himself standing on a chair washing dishes at the Detroit restaurant when he was five years old.

"I like proof," he said. "This pot, this colander and this cart are in this kitchen here. My parents always said I was the baby who was born on the kitchen counter."

He learned cooking from his grandma. "I'm a baby who she would hold in her arms and stir the pot. It always came natural to me."

He'll be looking for work beginning Jan. 1, either as a chef or a manager. But before Conte tackles the future, he will celebrate a successful past.

"We've had a nice long run here," Conte said. "New Year's Eve will be a very sad night for me."

Conte, who's single, lives in downtown Farmington with Oliver, his African Grey parrot, who's 13 years old.

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PHOTOS BY BILL BRESSLER / OBSERVER

Jacob Zatsick's town features a haunted winery, much like the Winery on Grand River at Orchard Lake Road.

**William Grace kids make a community**

BY SUE BUCK  
STAFF WRITER

What does it take to make a community? William Grace Elementary students have learned the answer is hard work, people and a lot of heart.

"They had to make a community; it could be any community, preferably Farmington," said Candy Marrn, a third grade teacher at the Farmington Hills school. "This is a social studies class. We learn all about Farmington in the third grade."

Students had to have eight buildings and six community facilities. "I thought it would be neat for them to see what makes up a community — firemen, policemen, nurses. They had to have street signs and transportation. They had to have some kind of landscape, trees or bushes. And they had to name their town. They had a month to do their projects."

The projects were displayed in the hallway. Hailey Jasinski, named her town after herself. "Welcome to Haileyville" read the sign. "It's very big," she said. Ariel George who left William Grace also left her project behind. "Her Grandma helped her crochet the buildings," Marrn said. "The people are made out of felt and fabric."

Mariah Escamilla chose to make the City of Lansing, which she has visited. In this Lansing, Willie Wonka's Chocolate Factory is found. Alex Barry made the City of Farmington Hills. There's a doctor's office and a science lab. "It was fun," Barry said. In Zatsickville named after Jacob Zatsick the buildings were hand-made with a little help. "My Dad helped me cut the wood," Jacob said.

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Hailey Jasinski created Haileyville.

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