

Birmingham reels in Mitchell's Fish Market

BY ELEANOR HEALD
CORRESPONDENT

Over the last few years, southeast Michigan has attracted a number of upscale national-chain restaurants, choosy about their high-profile locations. The latest of these is Mitchell's Seafood Market, which opened Friday, May 2, on the ground floor of The Willits, a luxury condo complex in downtown Birmingham.

Owner/president Cameron Mitchell is the energy and idea-man behind the restaurant corporation Cameron Mitchell Restaurants, headquartered in Columbus, Ohio. The company has grown from a single unit in 1993 to 19 units with nine different concepts in four states. Birmingham is the seventh Fish Market restaurant to open.

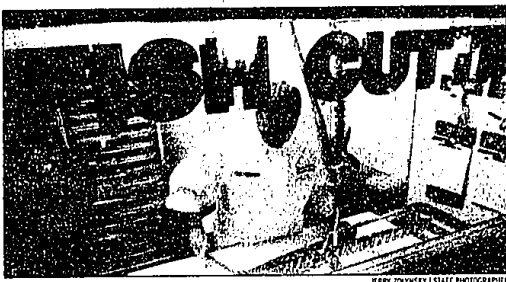
Mitchell knows the restaurant industry from dishwasher to the president's desk. In 1979, he got his first taste of the business as a dishwasher at a local Columbus, Ohio, steakhouse. A few years later, he graduated from the Culinary Institute of America and began to climb the corporate ladder of another Columbus restaurant group. As an entrepreneur in 1993, he left to form his own company.

BIRMINGHAM FIT
Mitchell's seats 250, including a private dining room for 18. The great seafood houses of coastal America inspire the design and atmosphere, complementing the over 80 menu items utilizing fresh seafood, flown in daily from coastal origins and displayed at the entrance to the open kitchen.

A custom-designed refrigerated seafood preparation room at a constant 36 degrees Fahrenheit, maintains maximum freshness once seafood deliveries are made. True to the "Market" in its name, Mitchell's Fish Market also features a retail seafood menu of fresh fish and seafood to go.

A large reception area divides a cigar-friendly bar with 35 stools and additional table seating for 40 from a richly wooded no-smoking main eating area off the open kitchen. A nautical bar mural hints at boating on local waters while the non-smoking area offers the feel of eating on a docked private yacht with rich wood decor. Many polished brass-accented comfortable booths set another mood while tables at the windows offer a city "shore" view.

Among the unique cocktail pours is Whatyoutalkinbout Willits, a spin on a Cosmopolitan, christened by General Manager Mark Weiss, a Birmingham resident. The name is but one clue about a restaurant that takes seafood, fun and gracious hospitality seriously.



Executive Chef Seanne Myers prepares salmon at the cutting station at Mitchell's Fish Market.

MITCHELL'S FISH MARKET

Where: 117 Willis Street, Birmingham (248) 646-3663.

Open: Lunch and dinner daily. Sunday brunch 11:30 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Food style: Eighty preparations of daily-delivered fresh seafood from national and international waters and selected turf items.

Cost: Lunch \$7-\$13. Dinner \$8-\$20. Sunday brunch specials \$8-\$11. Fun kids' menu items at \$5.

Reservations: Accepted.

ON THE MENU

"Preparing seafood is all I've ever done," said 27-year-old Executive Chef Seanne Myers, a graduate of Pennsylvania Institute of Culinary Arts in Pittsburgh. A native of Kent, Ohio, she now makes her home in Troy. "With seafood, the concept is all about what's fresh," she added.

Except for sandwiches at lunch and steak or chicken options at dinner, the menu for each service time is nearly identical. Based on Mitchell's Seafood Market in other locations, Chef Seanne noted the trendy menu items.

"From the raw bar, oysters are popular," she said. "Oysters have seasons, therefore we source them that way and from the coldest waters. We always have three East Coast and one from the West Coast."

Other house special "starters" are Beer-Boiled Jumbo Shrimp Cocktail, Seared Rare Salt 'n Pepper Tuna, and N'Awlins BBQ Shrimp or if you prefer soup, it's Maine Lobster Bisque.

The Beachcomber's Platter offers three tastes in one, broiled Atlantic salmon, shrimp and scallops, accompanied by creamy garlic mashed potatoes and vegetable garnish of the day. Sweet corn sauté in addition to creamy garlic mashed potatoes are an excellent plate accompaniment to Chesapeake Bay Crab Cakes. To heighten the experience, pair this dish with a food-friendly chardonnay, such as the 2000 Byron, 2000 St. Francis or 2001 Chateau St. Jean "Belle Terre."

These are only a few of the well-priced selections on the progressive wine list (wines listed from lightest to heaviest), accessible on the back of the daily-dated menu.

Chef Seanne, whom you'll see visiting tables, especially likes her Cedar Roasted Atlantic Salmon, roasted and served on a cedar plank, and her Blackened Florida Mahi Mahi, served with flash-fried rock shrimp, sautéed spinach, sweet onion hash browns and a Zydeco BBQ sauce (\$11.50 at lunch and \$17.95 at dinner).

Keeping with the seafood theme, don't miss Sharkfin Pie, Johnson's butter fudge ice cream, honey-roasted peanuts, fudge, peanut butter, Oreo cookie crust, all topped with whipped cream. Or if you like your dessert in liquid form, a number of specialty coffee drinks, Single Malt Scotch, cognacs and Ports require only a simple request.

Eleanor Heald is a nationally published writer and Troy resident who writes about restaurants, 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 1664H.

CITY BITES

City Bites lists wine dinners, holiday brunches, and other special culinary events. To be included, send information to Keely Kaleski, assistant managing editor, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 805 E. Maple, Birmingham, MI 48009, fax (248) 644-1314, or e-mail kkaleski@oe.com

MOTHER'S DAY

Michigan Star Clipper
All aboard for Mother's Day Dinner on the Michigan Star Clipper Dinner Train, Pontiac Trail, north of Maple Road in Walled Lake. Mom will enjoy a three-hour train excursion and five-course gourmet dinner with live entertainment on Sunday, May 11. Train leaves at 5 p.m. Cost is \$72.50 per person, all mothers receive \$10 off. Reservations required, call (248) 959-9440, www.michiganstarclipper.com

Champagne brunch
At the Finnish Center on the north side of Eight Mile Road, west of Farmington Road, between Gill and Newburgh in Farmington Hills, 12:30-3 p.m. Sunday, May 11. Complimentary carriages for mothers and champagne served from a champagne fountain. A variety of brunch selections ranging from breakfast to dinner prepared by Chef Mike Grant will be served. Craft for kids, program and prizes. Cost \$12.50 adults, \$3.50 child-

dren under 12. Call (248) 478-9939 for reservations.

Meadow Brook Hall
Tea with Mom 2-3 p.m. Sunday, May 11, cost \$20 per child, \$35 per adult. Mother's Day dinner begins at 6 p.m. with a champagne reception followed by four-course meal prepared by Executive Chef Danny Martinez. Cost \$75 per person, includes tax tip, gratuity. Reservations required, call (248) 370-3140 or visit www.meadowbrookhall.org. Meadow Brook Hall is on the campus of Oakland University in Rochester.

Five Lakes Grill
Mother's Day brunch, limited menu, adults \$19.95, children 6-12, \$8.95, no charge for children under 6. 424 N. Main St., Millford, call (248) 684-7455.

Unique Restaurant Corp.
Serving Mother's Day brunch beginning at 10 a.m. Sunday, May 11, at Morels and Northern Lakes Seafood Company, Call Morels (248) 642-1094 or Northern Lakes Seafood Company, (248) 646-7900 for reservations/information. SHRAX (248) 645-5289, Duet (313) 831-2828 and Ho Vi Teahouse, (248) 305-5310 will open at noon for dinner and serve until 8 p.m. Morels and Northern Lakes Seafood Company open at 5 p.m. and serve until 9 p.m. All of the venues will have their regular dinner menu.

Tribute's executive chef wins James Beard Award

BY ELEANOR HEALD
CORRESPONDENT

At the 13th annual James Beard Foundation Awards event, Monday, May 5 in New York's Marriott Marquis hotel, Executive Chef Takashi Yagihashi of Tribute restaurant in Farmington Hills was named Best Chef of the Midwest.

Established in 1990 and akin to an Oscar in the film world, the James Beard Foundation Awards are the premier honors for fine food and beverage professionals in North America.

Nominees and winners are selected by an independent volunteer panel of more than 500 food and beverage professionals from around the country who vote in specific award categories related to their

expertise. The accounting firm, Lutz & Carr, tabulates ballots. Winners' identities remain confidential until the awards ceremonies. Winners receive a bronze medallion engraved with the image of James Beard.

The James Beard Foundation presents its annual awards with generous support from a host of contributors. American Express sponsored Best Chef in the Midwest that also included other talented chef nominees Roger Johnson from Aquavit in Minneapolis. And from Chicago Paul Kahan of Blackbird, Michael Kornick of MK and Tony Mantuano from Spingola.

Tribute is located at 31425 W. 12 Mile Road, Farmington Hills (248) 848-9393 and is open for dinner Tuesday-Saturday.

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