

SMORGASBORD OF DELIGHT WESTON BUSINESS CHAMBER OF COMMERCE'S TASTE OF WESTON A HUGE HIT

By Kenneth D. MacHarg

It was a food gourmet's dream come true. A large hotel ballroom ringed by tables overflowing with delicacies from 32 of the Weston area's finest restaurants.

From the common to the sublime, the beautiful to the unusual, the healthy to the absolutely sinful, area chefs proudly provided teasing samples of their best to several hundred attendees helping to inaugurate the newly formed Weston Business Chamber of Commerce.

"We wanted to say that we are here in a big way," said Todd Templin, a Pembroke Pines resident who serves as the new chamber's public relations director. "This was a special kick off event for the chamber to introduce ourselves."

Templin said that around 300 people attended the Taste of Weston on September 24 at the Wyndham Resort and Spa in Weston. "We are here to showcase Weston's restaurants and to celebrate the good things that Weston has to offer," Templin said.

Among the unusual was the Mashed Potato Martini topped with shrimp served up by Al Senter of Weston who is the president of Senter Catering in Tamarac. "It's one of our newer dishes," Senter explained. "But we are better known for our Warm Asian Duck Salad in which we marinate duck in soy sauce and then add garlic, orange, grenadine, thyme and a teriyaki glaze."

Senter said that his company caters 150 parties a year, from sit-down dinners to birthday parties.

Across the hall, Tonya Williams of Weston, who helps cook at Ben and Bob's Gourmet Market in Weston, was serving up Chicken Frances, a delicacy that she said was special because "it uses the freshest and most natural ingredients. The secret is the combination of ingredients."

Several chefs were hesitant to talk about what went in to their creations, claiming a "secret recipe" as the key to their success. "We have a homemade secret recipe for our barbecue sauce," said Caryl Hirschfeld of Cooper City as she served up a small slab of ribs from Stevie B's Rib Café in Weston and Pembroke Pines.

"No, it's not a secret recipe like Colonel Sanders'" she said with a laugh, "but it is the secret to ribs which are our specialty." Hirschfeld said that her restaurants opened in south Florida five years ago and are part of a chain that originated in Chicago.

There were no secret ingredients in the offerings of Rachel and Larry Gebaide who own and operate Tastebuds Catering in Davie. "We say that we cook Betty Crocker style,"

explained Larry as he dished up a serving of almond crusted salmon. “There is nothing flashy, nothing fancy in what we serve, just quality food.”

“Our food is distinct in that we actually use my grandmother’s recipes,” said Rachel. “They are ethnic recipes from Greece and Turkey that my grandmother used. Our food is almost all Mediterranean style.”

The couple, who live in Sunrise, began their business in 1995 and said that they cater many parties and corporate accounts.

While some chefs served food from their own ethnic background, others reached out across cultures to present their culinary specialties. “I wanted to go into the restaurant business and this restaurant was for sale, so I decided to go with it,” explained Monica Garafulic of Weston who bought the Antonellos Italian restaurant there a year and a half ago.

Garafulic and her family moved here from their native La Paz, Bolivia two and a half years ago.

“It was a family decision and our family helps run it,” she said referring to her parents and husband who help her. “We are a fan of Italian food and we kept the same chefs when we bought it,” she explained.

Garafulic said that one of the restaurant’s most popular dishes is ravioli topped with stone crabs.

On the more common side at the event was Bob Cable’s Dunkin Donuts. “They wanted someone to serve coffee and we have the best iced coffee in town,” said Cable who lives in Weston. “It’s fresh ground.”

Cable and a business partner have operated two Baskin and Robbins ice cream outlets in the area for seven years and just added the donut service to their stores in early September.

On the decadent end of the food chain, Catering by Design, located in Davie, offered participants a tempting chocolate raspberry truffle. “I’m a chocolate and raspberry freak, so we came up with four different recipes for this truffle,” explained Dean Bennett who lives in Loxahatchee. “I just had to taste all of them until we decided which was best,” he said, describing the task tongue-in-cheek as a hardship chore that comes with the job.

Bennett said that the company caters between 700 and 900 parties a year, providing “everything in food and drink.”

Chamber officials said they were pleased with the success of the Taste of Weston and plan to make it into an annual event.

Officials are also pleased with the reception that the new chamber is receiving in Weston. “We originally had a goal of 90 members in 90 days,” said Dick Trimarche of Weston who is the chamber’s Chairman of the Board. “Now, after just three months, we have 150 members and are planning for 300 by the end of the year. It has been a phenomenal rate of growth.”

Templin said that 35 new members joined the chamber at the Taste of Weston event.

Trimarche said that many who attended were “networking, doing business, talking shop, helping each other out.” We are on the right track,” he said.

SMORGASBORD OF DELIGHT WESTON BUSINESS CHAMBER OF COMMERCE'S TASTE OF WESTON A HUGE HIT, *South Florida Sun-Sentinel*, Oct 4, 2002