

New Prestonwood chef brings 'New Ah'lens' zest to town

Prestonwood members might have noticed considerable changes in the clubs' dining rooms in recent months but aren't sure what or whom to attribute them to.

Perhaps the new executive chef and operations manager Michael Chuong is the source.

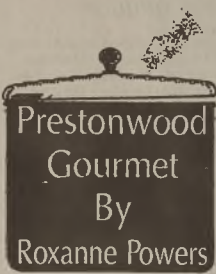
Hailed in from New Orleans, Chuong has executed the following changes:

Starting with a new "Members First!" mission statement, Prestonwood staff members are doing everything they can to leave members feeling like royalty.

One of the amenities members wanted was the creativity of the formal dining room menu without pomp and circumstance. They wanted to be able to eat there without having to wear formal attire.

Chuong responded by changing the name from "Formal Dining Room" to "Member Dining" where the dress code for the rest of the club applies too.

I was glad to see that "Member Dining" also seems to mean "more Available" and "More Predictable." I was beginning to think I should



carry the club calendar with me everywhere I went. I tend to have a foggy memory and it seemed that that every time there was a "special event," the "Formal Dining Room" was temporarily snatched away from its members.

For instance, in the past, if members' taste buds happened to be in the mood for creative cuisine on the evening of a wedding reception or other scheduled event, they would just have to appease them elsewhere

Oyster Tequila Sunrise

(Serves two)
1 doz. Oysters (in the shell)
1 tsp. sour cream
Beluga caviar

Mix following ingredients in small bowl. This will be the salsa.

Tequila (optional)
1 large tomato finely diced
¼ finely diced onion
1 fresh lime (the juice)
1 jalapeno
1 tsp. chopped fresh cilantro
1 tsp. sweet and sour mix
½ tsp. olive oil
Salt to taste

To serve: Place shucked oysters on the half shell on ice; top them with tomato salsa followed by sour cream, and finally generous amount of Beluga caviar.

until the wedding was over! Now, come wedding or wake, "Member Dining" is available every Friday and Saturday night from 6 p.m. to 10

p.m. Reservations are preferred, but not required.

Of course, wherever you see changes in attitudes and schedules, you will also see changes in staff.

Two new staffers came with Chef Chuong from the City Energy Club of New Orleans, which is a member of Club Corporation of America. They are Jill Stamps and Ed Daily, who will coordinate services in the Prestonwood dining rooms. You will probably be hearing more about them in my column at a later date.

When it comes to dining, if the food is not superb, all the services and amenities in the world will not help.

Well, you can relax.

The food is superb. Many restaurants in the area have laid claim to an intimate relationship with New Orleans cuisine but alas—they lie. (Not all the culinary schools in the world, nor considerable knowledge of the terms *lagniappe*, *roux*, and *Mardi Gras* qualifies one as a preparer of "New Ah'lens" cuisine. You have to live it.)

The food presented under the direction of Chef Chuong has a

delightful honesty. So much so, that it seems to have an attitude of acceptable arrogance that could only come from New Orleans.

And for good reason. Chuong trained for his roles as junior chef de partie and junior sous chef under acclaimed chefs Patrick Nitto and Andre Billon Tirraud of the intercontinental gourmet restaurant Les Continents.

Later, Chuong served under executive chefs Helmut Sussenbach and Willy Coln, who some claim to be the most respected chef in the New Orleans culinary field.

In 1979, when he was 16 years old, Chuong's father put him on a boat leaving Vietnam to come to America.

Says Chef Chuong, "Like most teenagers, I wanted my freedom, and I got it in large doses. To be free from my parents' rule and to be coming to a country of so many choices was exciting."

Fortunately, fate served him well, for upon his arrival in America, it was arranged for him to stay in an orphanage while he adjusted to the new customs and language. He later

went to college at Louisiana State University and after graduating, he joined the four star Hotel Inter-Continental New Orleans staff that trained him in the true classical tradition.

Chuong, who says he was influenced by a mother who is almost always cooking, is married to Lan and has four daughters: Vi Chuong, an eighth grader at Davis Drive Elementary School, Christina, a three-year-old who attends preschool at St. Michael's, and two daughters who are students at Weatherstone Elementary—Van, a fifth grader, and Victoria, a second grader.

The family, who is building a home on Davis Drive, didn't waste any time in establishing roots in the area. Says Chuong, "I wanted Prestonwood members and staff to know that I am committed to my position here."

Chuong offers the following simple, but elegant recipe for those men desiring to please and impress the special woman in their lives for Valentine's Day. (It's only about two weeks away guys.)

Good Hope Church ministering with program for preschoolers

By Mary Beth Phillips

Good Hope Baptist Church in Carpenter is hosting a Mother's Morning Out program run by the Cary Family YMCA in a mutually-beneficial arrangement that may be expanded.

Dr. Paul Alverson, pastor at Good Hope, said this is the first church he's ever been associated with that didn't have some sort of preschool program.

"It's a marvelous ministry," he said. "You get to meet some neat folk, and obviously we have an eye out for the future. These folk coming into our community and bringing their children to this church will learn about us. The children will want to go to church on Sunday, we hope. We needed to let the community know this is a church out here, viable, living, working, and doing good stuff."

Betsy Peters, director of children's programs for the Y, said the church is about five and a half miles from the Y and convenient to Apex, Morrisville and Cary.

"We think it's a great location, a wonderful church, a wonderful playground area, it's perfect," she said.

The program started the first week in January, with two three-hour sessions each on Monday-Wednesday and Tuesday-Thursday mornings. There are 30 children in each session—15 two-and-a-half-year-olds,

and 15 three-year-olds, for 60 total. The two-year-old classes have three teachers each; the three-year-old classes have two teachers, Ms. Peters said.

The program is not full yet. There are about 10 openings for three-year-olds over both sessions, and two openings remain for two-and-a-half-year-olds in the Tuesday-Thursday class.

So far, it's going "just great," Alverson said. "They are real professionals. We didn't have the headache and heartache of trying to start up. Betsy just came in with all of her smarts and said we'll do this and this, you do this and that and this."

Some of the children are members of the Y. Others are newcomers to the area who couldn't get into another preschool program.

"Our goal was just to have the community involved," Alverson said. "This little church has been sitting over here in this little oasis for a long time. People go up and down the road saying what a neat little place. Now we have Brook Arbor, Carpenter Village and all those communities on (N.C.) 55. We've just got to minister to these folks. A lot of them are young couples, and young couples have children," he said.

Alverson has been permanent pastor at the church for less than a year,

but he has been serving as interim pastor since long-time pastor Bobby Weatherspoon left in September of 1996.

This is the second church that the Y has made an agreement with. Good Shepherd United Church of Christ on Maynard Road has housed a program that is exactly the same with a total of 60 children. They have been operating since fall.

Space in churches is needed because the YMCA is bursting at the seams, Ms. Peters said. There are already 60 preschool children a day in the "Sneaker Club," plus an addi-

tional 100 a day in the nursery. Also in the YMCA facility daily are 160 tracking-out children from year-round schools.

A contract has been signed through May but both sides are enthusiastic about continuing.

"We want to have a summer program out there for 2- and 3-year-olds and a program from fall of 98 until May of 99," Ms. Peters said. "We're excited to be at the church, and looking forward to its growing."

"With the way it's going right now, I can see absolutely no reason not to continue," Alverson said.

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