

ON THE BENEFITS MENU

Chef Greg Lepesh caters to an exclusive Silicon Valley clientele. **By Geoffrey Tomb**

A PIANIST is playing what could be called cappuccino music: frothy stuff for a mid-day pick-me-up. Sunlight fills the dining room from overhead skylights and curved glass exterior walls. Just outside is a blooming, manicured garden, while beyond is a riverside park, filled with billowing flags and winter-Wyeth trees.

Tables for 400 beckon; there are another 60 out on the garden patio: smokers' exile. The room—tile, marble, terrazzo, glass—is airport-like and noisy, lacking cozy nooks. Tables are not covered in starched white linen but each one features a pepper-and-salt mill and a vase of silk flowers.

An open kitchen, complete with brick-lined pizza oven, separate saute station, charbroiler and a cold table "charcuterie," dominates interior walls of the airy second-floor setting.

Enter the domain of 32-year-old star chef Greg Lepesh, as approachable as a politician, as virile as a mountain biker, as in command as a surgeon. At the mo-

PATRICK TÉHAN



Greg Lepesh fires things up in the kitchen of Adobe Systems' gourmet cafe.

ment he is hovering, trolling for reactions to the day's special.

He has 16 hours invested in a single dish, having begun marinating the meat the day before. It is osso bucco, made with lamb, not the usual veal. (Some of his customers object to veal, he explains.) Slow-cooked with a *mirepoix* of carrot, onion, celery, thyme and bay leaf plus oyster, shiitake and button mushrooms, it is finished with a wine demiglace. Dense, succulent, the meat slips from the bone.

He pairs this with soft polenta flecked with rosemary and fresh

Brussels sprouts. These are steamed first, then served with a saute of bacon and onion. The plate is garnished with whole leaves of sage flash-fried in hot-hot 550-degree canola oil. Their texture shatters to even the most tentative of bites.

The price for this luncheon special osso bucco: \$5.50.

Welcome to one of the most exclusive restaurants in Silicon Valley. It is Adobe Cafe, a first-class addition to the downtown dining scene with a classically trained chef, a graduate of San Francisco's Califor-

nia Culinary Academy. But don't bother looking up the address, calling for hours or booking a table. You can't dine there unless you are an invited guest or one of the 1,700 employees of Adobe Systems. Most days, Monday through Friday, 700 to 800 of them will consume breakfast and lunch in the corporate dining room.

"In Silicon Valley, the corporations are really in competition for employees," says George Maciag,

president of Guckenheimer Enterprises Inc., the Redwood Shores company that operates Adobe Cafe. "So the quality of the food service becomes an employee benefit." When *Fortune* magazine rated the 100 best companies to work for, it mentioned the food at Adobe.

Among the culinary pleasures are chorizo, potato and pineapple calzone from the brick oven (\$3.95); spicy Cajun wrap with andouille sausage, clams, rock cod, chicken and fresh garlic (\$5.35); rosemary-crusted roast beef carved to order with scalloped potatoes and steamed fresh vegetables, au jus