

TABLE

(\$5.25); blackened tilapia with home-made chipotle butter sauce (\$5.75); shredded beef or chicken mole burrito with red rice and choice of black or refried beans (\$5.25). Employees also get free drinks, bottled waters, coffee, sodas and juices with meals and at any time of the day. Espresso is served with snacks from 2 to 2:30 p.m.

Recently, for Adobe executives, Lepesh did tournedos Rossini made with medallions of filet mignon, fresh Sonoma foie gras, white truffles and a Madeira demiglace. As found in Escoffier? "The classic. Absolutely," says Lepesh.

Among Guckenheimer's corporate clients are Sun Microsystems Inc., 3Com Corp., Hewlett-Packard, Sony, Chevron, Bank of America and Altera Corp. The company now serves 348 accounts in 19 states. It produces some \$200 million in sales. Most of its restaurants, like Adobe's, operate for-profit, says Maciag; Guckenheimer normally pays no rent for the dining room-kitchen space and does not have to buy kitchen equipment.

"The chef is the maestro," Maciag says. "He is the creative force. We have standards but we don't have set programs. We don't believe in centralized menus. The chef is in control. We give our chefs a lot of freedom, a lot of freedom."

Starting salary for his chefs is between \$35,000 and \$40,000. Top pay goes up to \$65,000, and all Guckenheimer employees get health benefits and stock options. The company is one-third employee-owned.

In addition to the pay, Lepesh, who was named Guckenheimer's chef of the year for 1999, finds attractive having no night work, and weekends and most major holidays off. He is single and spends much of his free time racing motorcycles, having risen to the level of expert in the world of motocross. That's one level below pro, he notes.

He has been cooking since he was 13 and worked in a pizza parlor in Los Altos. He moved on to restaurants in San Francisco, Maui and Lake Tahoe. At Jake's on the Lake he asked the executive chef how he got his job. Culinary school, the chef replied, without blinking.

After 16 months of professional schooling, Lepesh had assistant chef jobs at the Faultline Brewing Co., a Wyndham hotel in Seattle and Left



The buffet lineup at Adobe Cafe displays some of Lepesh's creations.

at Albuquerque in San Jose's Pruneyard, where he perfected his fondness for Mexican cooking.

Then he left for Adobe Cafe, where his name and the name of sous-chef Francisco Sotoron appear on each day's printed menu.

"Here I get to use my passion," Lepesh says. "They encourage me to search for the best ingredients. I roam through the local markets. I've discovered some really unusual Korean markets. This is one of the few restaurants in the city where risotto is made from scratch. Lots of chefs are afraid to do that, or for them it's all about price."

A large portion of his customers/fans are vegetarians, so Lepesh strains to come up with something other than the usual suspects—grilled vegetables—for them. One of his creations is grilled whole portobello mushroom parmigiana served with fettuccine and fresh vegetables (\$5.25). Despite the high cost of the mushrooms, Lepesh has not been told to cut back the size of the portions or the cost of the ingredients.

"You know, every single day, every single minute, I try to do the best I ever have. Today I was the best I've ever been. And you know what? Tomorrow I will be even better."

The following are some of Greg Lepesh's recipes:

AUNT FLORENCE'S STUFFED ARTICHOKE

6 to 8 large fresh artichokes
2½ to 3 cups bread crumbs
3 cloves garlic, minced
½ cup Italian parsley, minced
½ cup good quality olive oil
½ cup parmesan cheese, preferably Parmigiana-Reggiano
Salt and pepper to taste
1 8-oz. can tomato sauce

Cut artichoke stems off at base and peel away outer leaves. Cut off

top of artichoke and remaining tips of the leaves to remove sharp stickers.

Mix well bread crumbs, garlic, parsley, oil, cheese, and salt and pepper. Peel back artichoke leaves one at a time and place approximately 1 teaspoon stuffing into each opening, pressing firmly to pack stuffing into inside of leaf.

Arrange artichokes in a Dutch oven and add water to approximately half the height of the vegetables. Top each artichoke with about one tablespoon tomato sauce. Bring water to boil and reduce heat to medium. Cook covered for 45 minutes or until base of artichoke is easily pierced with a knife or fork. Add water if needed.

BAKED LING COD POMODORO WITH POTATOES

2 lbs. boiling or russet potatoes
¾ cup olive oil
½ cup minced Italian parsley
Fresh cracked pepper and salt to taste
1 cup yellow onion, slivered
1 tablespoon minced garlic
2 15 oz. cans imported Italian plum tomatoes, cut up with juice
2 tablespoons rinsed capers
2½ lbs. ling cod fillet

Preheat oven to 450 degrees. Peel and quarter potatoes and rinse in cold water. Toss with half of the olive oil in a 16-by-20-inch baking dish. Add half the parsley and a pinch of salt and pepper. Roast potatoes until almost done, about 30 minutes. Remove from oven.

In a large bowl, mix remaining oil and parsley, onion, garlic, tomatoes and capers. Loosen potatoes from bottom of pan and place fish, skin side down, on top of potatoes. Pour the tomato mixture over the fish. Return to oven and bake 6-8 minutes. Spoon mixture from bottom of pan over fish, and return to oven until done, about 5-8 minutes longer.

Serve directly from baking dish.

Serves 8.

BLOOD ORANGE BAVARIAN CREAM WITH ALMOND TUILLE

For the Bavarian Cream:

1½ oz. unflavored gelatin
10 oz. cold water
8 oz. egg yolks
8 oz. sugar
1 pint milk
1 pint blood orange juice
Zest of two blood oranges
2 pints heavy cream

Soak gelatin in cold water. Note: measure ingredients accurately or the results may be stiff and rubbery.

Whip egg yolks and sugar until thick and light. Scald the milk and slowly add the egg yolk mixture, beating constantly. Place in a water bath or double boiler, add orange zest and cook until slightly thickened or until it coats the back of a spoon.

Stir gelatin mix into the custard until it dissolves completely. Remove from heat and cool.

Whip cream until it forms a soft peak. When the custard is cool and thick, fold in blood orange juice followed by the whipped cream. Chill until completely set.

Makes about 3 quarts.

For the Almond Tuille:

8 oz. sugar
9 oz. sliced blanched almonds
1½ oz. flour
4½ oz. lightly beaten egg whites
1½ oz. melted butter

Preheat oven to 375 degrees.

Mix sugar, almonds and flour in a bowl. Add egg whites and melted butter. Stir until well-mixed.

On a silicone baking liner, available at gourmet stores, drop batter by the tablespoon about 2 inches apart from one another, about ½ oz. to ¾ oz. per cookie. With a fork dipped in water, flatten each to spread batter evenly, very thin and flat. (It will not spread during baking.)

Bake until browned. Remove one at a time and drape over a small, inverted ramekin to shape them into cups. They will become crisp when cooled. If they aren't crisp, return to oven for a minute. If they become crisp before they can be shaped, re-heat until they are pliable.

Pipe Blood Orange Bavarian Cream into each cup and garnish with an orange segment, whipped cream and a mint sprig. Serve with toasted almonds.

Makes about 25 cookies.

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