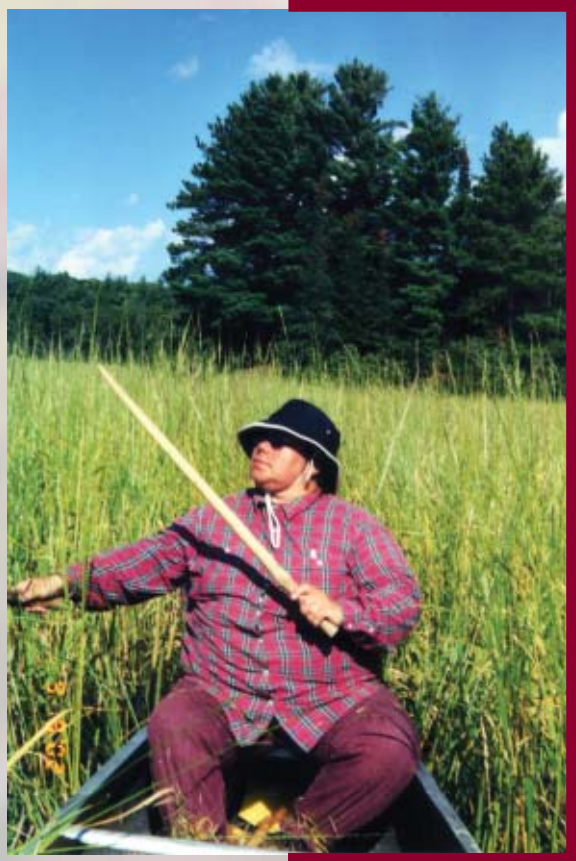


Ojibwe

spirit food

By KRISTI EVANS



Terry Fox, pictured above, is the director of the Health Clinic at the Lac Vieux Desert tribal offices in Watersmeet. Terry and her husband Charlie have been instrumental in reintroducing wild rice traditions to their tribe. Terry is shown “knocking down” wild rice.

It is a gray, misty morning deep in the Sylvania Wilderness Track on the western end of Michigan's Upper Peninsula. A "grandfather" eagle sits atop a dead balsam, scanning the lake for a surfacing bass or walleye. Spiritual elder Archie McGeshick Sr. stands in his boat. He is dying of cancer but continues to plant wild rice seed to enhance what has become a huge bed after seven years of planting.

McGeshick faces east and, rotating clockwise, prays to each of the Manidos (spirits) of the four directions. He then raises his tobacco with his left hand and offers prayers to the Great Spirit, the Water Spirits, the Shore Spirits, and all spirits present.

This is the opening sequence of a new ethnographic documentary on Ojibwe traditions of "wild ricing" by NMU professor and filmmaker Michael Loukinen (pictured on the right). Most of the video was recorded in the vicinity of the Lac Vieux Desert community in Watersmeet.

"Ojibwe youth are losing the wild ricing traditions of their ancestors due to the deaths of knowledgeable elders like Archie and the harmful environmental pressures impacting their sacred lake, Lac Vieux Desert," Loukinen said. "There has long been an identity between the lake and the tribe. This video will preserve the ricing traditions for future generations and tell us a great deal about the history of the lake."

The documentary covers the practices of planting, rice-boat building, harvesting, parching, dancing, winnowing, cooking, and finally eating wild rice at a feast. It incorporates live-action scenes with historical photographs, animation,

music, and narration. Much of the latter was provided by Thomas Vennum, ethnologist emeritus of the Smithsonian Institution and author of the award-winning *Wild Rice and the Ojibwe People*.

The film not only shows the wild ricing traditions, but the teaching of these traditions to Ojibwe children.

"This was made for a general audience, but it will be especially interesting to parents and children, teachers, folk arts educators, cultural anthropologists, and Native American studies educators," Loukinen added.

A brief science segment explores how human and environmental forces affect the health and survival of wild rice. Peter David, a biologist with the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission, explains in the film that rice beds are declining throughout the Lake Superior region. He attributes the trend to the adverse impacts of the thinning ozone layer, variations in rainfall and snow melting, motorboat traffic, and especially dams.

The Lac Vieux Desert Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Lac first contacted Loukinen in 1996, after members became increasingly aware

of the loss of their traditional Elders.

They approved a two-pronged project: building a digital archive of video, sound, and transcribed text to preserve their tribal heritage; and completing a series of documentaries

designed to increase the understanding of and sense of appreciation for their heritage.

Loukinen began recording in 1998. *Ojibwe Teachings* was the first film in the series, followed by the recently completed *Wild Rice: A Lac Vieux Desert Ojibwe Tradition*.

Remaining productions will explore the history of the tribe's migration and settlement, evolving into a look at how the gaming industry has impacted contemporary work and leisure activities.

Throughout the process—from preparation to post-production—Loukinen relied heavily on the assistance of current and former NMU students. He has also utilized the expertise of NMU staff and faculty in such roles as narrator, cultural adviser, story consultant, and musician. Loukinen is planning to premier the film on the NMU campus sometime during the fall semester. ■





Catch of the Day

By KRISTI EVANS

AS THE FRIDAY LUNCH CROWD TAPERS OFF, STEVE LAHAIE '75 BA and I settle into a corner booth at the Mity Nice Bar & Grill in Chicago. This 1940s style eatery has a simple motto: good food, served right. It is nestled behind a bustling food court on the mezzanine level of Water Tower Place. The clientele is a mix of shoppers who pause to refuel before resuming their trek down Michigan Avenue, and neighborhood regulars who are on a first-name basis with the staff and order “the usual” without a glance at the menu.

LaHaie notifies me that our conversation will be interrupted briefly so that he can taste a variety of dip recipes. “We offer a spinach and crab right now, but some people have commented that there isn’t enough crab flavor to it,” he explains. “I think I want to switch to spinach and artichoke.”

Twenty minutes later, a chef appears at our table with five selections: bleu cheese and caramelized onion, spinach, artichoke, mozzarella cheese, and spinach and artichoke. But picking the best dip is only half the battle. On another tray are five different breads in contention for most favored accompaniment. LaHaie begins to sample and enlists my eager participation. We agree that the bleu cheese-onion combination, while very satisfying, is too rich. We also agree that a flatbread is

splash of lime to complement the cilantro. A few days prior, the dilemma was the best way to broil fish.

Tastings at odd times of the day. Experimenting with new ideas. Developing and upgrading menus. These are some of LaHaie’s responsibilities as a senior vice president with Lettuce Entertain You Enterprises. The Chicago-based company originated in 1971 when founder Richard Melman opened a hamburger and milkshake restaurant in Lincoln Park called R.J. Grunts. LEYE now owns, licenses, or manages more than 50 establishments in four states and Japan. The company has also created more than 100 concepts—some are maintained and developed by LEYE; most are sold to outside clients.

LaHaie joined the enterprise in 1981. However, the hospitality industry was not his first—or high-

while he was in back cooking.”

When LaHaie left for high school in Wisconsin, his mother uprooted the rest of the family and moved to Marquette specifically for Northern. She wanted all nine of her children to be able to go to college but knew it would be difficult to afford room and board for all of them. She saw it as an advantage to live in the same city. Three of the children graduated from Northern, and others attended at different times.

LaHaie rejoined the family for his senior year of high school and went on to earn a bachelor’s degree in business from NMU. He said there were relatively few dedicated hospitality management programs at that time. He put himself through college working at the university’s information desk and also spent about a year at the Holiday Inn

Tastings at odd times of the day.

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the ideal companion. It is less filling and, unlike some of the seasoned choices, will not compete with the flavor of the dip.

“I think I want to work on this spinach and artichoke,” LaHaie says to the chef. “Did you use marinated artichokes? I’m tasting the marinade, so let’s try using frozen ones instead.” He picks up a square of flatbread and adds, “And can we cut this into triangle wedges? I think that might work better.”

Earlier that day, LaHaie had conducted a blind taste test of salad dressings. He elected to keep the house vinaigrette, but with an added

est—calling. The Upper Peninsula native spent three years at a Wisconsin high school studying to be a priest. He eventually decided to pursue a career that was in his blood.

“My dad was a cook at the high school in St. Ignace and ran a family restaurant during the summer,” he said. “My mom was the waitress and bookkeeper. She also baked pies. I was pretty young when they had it, so I didn’t work there as much as my older siblings. But my dad was in Knights of Columbus and was always putting on dinners. I helped with those quite a bit. I would work the front of the house

under Ted Bogdan, who later joined the NMU faculty.

LaHaie completed a master of business administration degree in hotel and restaurant management at Michigan State. He turned down his first job offer—running the food service for the state corrections system, saying it wasn’t quite the direction he wanted to take. LaHaie spent about five years with a restaurant company that developed the Mountain Jack’s concept before joining Lettuce Entertain You Enterprises.

He started as manager of a seafood restaurant that has since

closed and then served as general manager of Shaw's Crab House. Now he oversees an entire division composed of four establishments: Mity Nice Bar & Grill, Vong's Thai Kitchen, and two Shaw's locations. LaHaie was involved in each from the beginning. When asked if a restaurant opening is as traumatic as portrayed in the summer reality-TV series about the business, he said it is very intense.

"It's like the opening of a Broadway show because all of the pieces have to come together. We've done so many of them by now that we have very good systems in place. We bring in a team that specializes in every aspect that we've developed over the years."

Mity Nice features a diverse menu—from specialty hamburgers and flatbreads with assorted toppings to classic comfort food such as macaroni and cheese and meatloaf.

"We have more repeat customers here than at the other restaurants, so we don't change our core menu much," LaHaie said. "You don't want to mess with what works, but you need to upgrade. I've messed with stuff before and taken things off the menu. Believe me, sometimes it's not worth it. I certainly wouldn't get rid of our hamburgers, but we have upgraded them. And I wouldn't touch the meatloaf recipe. It's been popular since day one."

LaHaie's endorsement motivated me to order the meatloaf for lunch the following afternoon. I couldn't recall ever selecting this entrée in a restaurant. Because of the wide variances in preparation and consistency, I had adopted the same mentality toward meatloaf that Forrest Gump applied to a box of

chocolates: "You never know what you're gonna get."

What I got was a mity nice meal. There were two thick slices of meatloaf leaning against a generous mound of mashed potatoes with a mushroom gravy drizzled over the top and fresh-from-the-farmer's-market green beans on the side. Despite the hefty portions, I cleaned my plate and could almost sense my mother's pride (but I will avoid any comparisons to her homemade version).

LaHaie spends most of his time supervising the day-to-day operations at Mity Nice. He is less directly involved in Vong's Thai Kitchen, which began as an upscale French-Thai fusion restaurant and transitioned to a more casual and affordable option dedicated to the Thai influence. It might have toned down in some respects, but certainly not in taste—at least judging by the signature "black plate" appetizer tray, not to mention the shrimp and crab Pad Thai, a traditional noodle dish.

Paula Zehnder, a manager at Vong's, shares two connections with LaHaie. She is a Michigan native and her parents are in the restaurant business. Zehnder did an internship with LaHaie's company and joined it full-time after graduation.

"Steve tries to create a family-run atmosphere wherever he works, and he takes care of his staff," she said. "He has an incredible knowledge of food and an impeccable palette. He is very hands-on in the kitchen, but he also has a great eye for detail in terms of atmosphere. He even designs the look of the menus, not just what's on them. Someone here described it as fish, fonts, and fabrics. Steve is involved in all of them because he knows how important the combination is."

LaHaie divides the remainder of his time between the Shaw's establishments. There, he is able to apply his vast seafood expertise, gleaned from both personal experience and avid research.

"My grandfather was a Great Lakes fisherman and we served whitefish and trout in the family restaurant, so I have been around it a long time," he said. "Seafood is what I've been most involved with during my time with the company. One thing I've worked on a lot, particularly at Shaw's, is developing sourcing of products—who we buy fish from—and setting the guidelines. For instance, we buy only whole fish and it's filleted on the premises as needed, not in advance."

LaHaie also helped develop the oyster program at Shaw's. He established relationships with growers on the East and West Coasts.

"At first, we only sold a couple varieties. We didn't know there were so many different species from different places and that some taste better at certain times of the year. Shaw's has become one of the great oyster houses in the country. There used to be many in Chicago in the early 1900s. I believe Illinois is the largest non-producing consumer of oysters in the country.

"Some people assume you can't get good seafood in the Midwest, but with O'Hare and modern air freight service, you can fly in fresh products from practically anywhere in three hours."

As a seafood lover, I was eager to give Shaw's a try. It's not often one can dine at a restaurant that boldly bills itself as "a monument to fish and seafood." With husband and two children in tow, I navigated my way to Hubbard Street and soon

spotted the canopy bearing the Shaw's name.

We entered promptly at the 11:30 a.m. opening time, as did a stream of others who appeared out of nowhere from nearby buildings. Shaw's is really two restaurants in one. To the right as you enter is the Blue Crab Lounge—a casual oyster bar featuring regional oysters on the half shell, clams, lobster, and crab dishes. Past the maitre d' station to the left is the main dining room with rich, burgundy hues and white-linen tablecloths. It serves more than 40 fresh seafood entrees as well as chicken, prime steaks, and pasta dishes.

The lunch menu is expansive—not the bare-bones version found at some establishments. LaHaie said the menu is printed daily to reflect the changing availability of fresh fish. A featured selection on this particular day was grilled Hawaiian snapper. Served with a tantalizing combination of black bean relish and roasted sweet corn sauce, the snapper immediately grabbed my attention. My husband, on a low-carb kick, was equally pleased with his sashimi tuna salad. The kids enjoyed popcorn shrimp that was a far cry above the boxed freezer variety they had come to expect. We began the meal with a wonderful oysters Rockefeller appetizer. I could hardly leave Chicago's "premier oyster house" without sampling this delicacy.

In addition to running the restaurants, LaHaie shares his expertise through a variety of professional activities. He is the Shaw's representative for the National



Photo by Jason Hollembeak.

Fisheries Institute, a lobbyist for the seafood industry. He serves on the advisory board for *Seafood Business* magazine and on the board for the Chicago chapter of the American Institute of Wine and Food, established by chef Julia Child and vintner Robert Mondavi to increase American's culinary IQs. LaHaie also has served as a panelist or moderator for discussions on such topics as the differences between farm-raised and wild salmon in terms of environmental and health issues.

The restaurant industry is impacted by external forces as well as changing trends in concepts and cuisine. An example of the former is the September 11 terrorist attacks. LaHaie said there was a noticeable dip in consumers eating out after the tragedy because they were compelled to share meals with their families in the comfort of home.

"The economy has also created challenges," he added. "Our company, from the top down, has endured layoffs like many others. All of our partners are much more

hands-on because of it. We used to have primarily desk jobs, but now we are out running the businesses. I actually prefer that and think it is a positive thing."

As for dining trends, LaHaie identified five that will have a major influence on the horizon. He said Asian cuisine is going to become more popular. Also, the population is aging, so restaurateurs are going to have to accommodate that market, which has different demands than younger clientele. Related to that, he said seafood will become more

popular because it is preferred by older people. There is also a trend toward simple, back-to-basics preparation and presentation, as well as an increased demand for organic foods.

"The challenge is adapting successfully," LaHaie said. "You need to have a drive to improve things and take risks, yet a part of you needs to be stable. The industry has changed so much in the last decade. Anyone who owns a restaurant today in Chicago has good food or they wouldn't be in business. But the competition is much fiercer than it's probably ever been..."

"What keeps me going is the continual challenge and my passion for what I do. I love my job. From a management perspective, I like directing and developing people. I also love food, the study of food, and food as it relates to people getting together and having a meal. It was always a big part of my family. I just like watching people eat, knowing they're having a good time and having them thank me on the way out for a great experience." ■



A TASTE OF THE TWENTIES

By MIRIAM MOELLER '00 BS, '02 MA



The Charleston, flappers, hot jazz, speakeasies, and bathtub gin. The roaring 20s came alive on the campus of Northern Michigan University this spring when students in the hospitality management and culinary arts programs hosted the ninth annual scholarship fundraising theme dinner. This year, university and community members got a taste of "The Greater Side of Gatsby."

Proceeds from the event fund the American Culinary Federation Upper Michigan Chapter David Sonderschafer Memorial Scholarship and the Thaddeus Bogdan Scholarship Fund.

But this event isn't only about raising money. It's one of the ways faculty members in the culinary and hospitality management programs immerse students in their majors.

"The event is entirely student driven," said Yvonne Lee, professor in the Technology and Occupational Sciences department and faculty adviser for the event. "Students are divided into six teams, and each team develops a concept and presents it to the class."

The students invited area professionals to serve as industry panelists who, along with the professor and the rest of the class, voted for their favorite theme. Once the theme was selected, the students had the semester to plan and practice every element of the event—from menu planning and recipe testing to invitation design, dining room décor, and serving methods.

Eric Hafner, who is pursuing an associate degree in culinary arts, was elected executive chef and planned the menu.

"My main goal was to use recipes that people have heard about before, but use them in a different way," he said.

Hafner was also responsible for purchasing the food and designing the presentation of each menu item, and he didn't leave anything to chance. He drew out each menu item on the computer and printed out color copies for the kitchen staff to use as a reference when arranging hors d'oeuvres and plating menu items.

Dining room manager Chris Pesce and his crew read *The Great Gatsby* and watched the movie adaptation to get a feel for how parties in the 1920s were hosted. Pesce, a junior hospitality management major, was in charge of the servers, decorations, table linens, silverware, and glassware.

On the day of the event, the Jacobetti Center took on the air of a true, jazz-age soiree. Once the dinner guests arrived, many clad in 1920s costume, the illusion was complete. Diners were treated to vegetable and fruit appetizers, a poached salmon and portobello mushroom pre-entrée, Caesar salad in a Parmesan tuile, beef tenderloin with cognac mustard sauce, mussels with orzo noodles, and bourbon-glazed ham. The meal was topped off with lemon cake garnished with sugar-frosted berries and a champagne toast.

Jay Gatsby would have been proud. ■



Photos, top to bottom: Kyle Warren of Marquette (waiter); Karen Saberniak of Chatham, Lee Ann Wiley of Skandia, and Jennifer Burkouricz of Green Bay, Wis. (pastry chefs giving a demonstration for display purposes); Matthew Kimble of West Branch, and Jesse Griffin of Marquette (preparing salmon entrée); and Katie Allen of Johannesburg (flapper). Photos by Kim Marsh '80 BS.