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EATING OUT

Bistro Bourdeau: service with flair

BY ELEANOR HEALD
SPECIAL WRITER

At age 5, Kipp Bourdeau made Eggs Benedict when his mother Nancy entertained friends for brunch.

"I always wanted to be a chef," Kipp recalled.

Now 31, Bourdeau and his 27 year-old wife Susan just weeks ago became proprietors of their first restaurant, Bistro Bourdeau, in the completely remodeled former location of Patrick's in Auburn Hills.

Gerry Yurik & Associates of Rochester executed a trendy, yet not overdone remodel. The large dining area seating 212 is well divided by an interior court created by circular walls, cozy bar at the entrance, small piano stage with tables for those wishing to dine by live music, wood-accented booths, tables for larger groups and nooks with quiet tables for two.

Kipp, originally from Davison near Flint, graduated from New York's Culinary Institute of America. He perfected his skills at The Cloister, a posh hotel retreat in Sea Island, Georgia. Over seven years, he climbed the culinary ladder from fry cook at The Cloister to executive chef at Sea Island's prestigious Ocean Forest Golf Club.

Susan Bourdeau is general manager running the "front of the house," as they say in restaurant speak. After earning a business degree at George Mason University in Virginia, she worked as a server trainer for Ritz-Carlton hotels. Expect good service at Bistro Bourdeau.

What's a bistro?

The Bourdeaus knew you'd ask this, so they made the answer part of the wall art encircling the interior court. It reads: Bistro, pronounced bis-tro or bes-tro and defined (1) as a small or unpretentious European restaurant and (2) bar: also nightclub. Definition No. 1 works fine, but Kipp expanded it.

"To me a bistro is a warm, inviting place with unintimidating foods that have flair," he said.

Attractively done in cobalt blue and cornflower yellow accented perfectly by khaki wall patches, the atmosphere is inviting and warm.

It seems to whisper "linger, enjoy the sounds of contemporary jazz in the background, and select from the regionally styled menu." White table cloths, cobalt blue water glasses, wine glasses and a featured bottle of wine on each table say "upscale," yet a glance at menu prices say "moderate" and that's definitely unintimidating.

Prices at lunch are about a third less than dinner. With some dishes, such as Jambalaya Pasta, portion size is barely scaled down. The same appetizers are offered at lunch and dinner. More salads are on the lunch menu and sandwiches are available at lunch, but not dinner.

What's cooking?

The Bistro Bourdeau menu represents the food Kipp likes to eat.

"A homey food style," he called it. "We lived a short time in Destin, Florida, where I re-opened a restaurant for the owner. We were close to New Orleans, so I became fond of the regional style there. At Sea Island, I gained appreciation for unique seafood preparations. My cooking style has been influenced by where I've worked and traveled."

Kipp was asked to recommend his favorites.

Among appetizers, he suggested the cross-regional Buffalo Style Gulf Coast Shrimp. Shrimp replaces chicken wings with the traditional bleu cheese dipping sauce.

Portabella Mushroom Napoleon and Bistro Onion Soup are cast as "award winning." They are original dishes that have won Kipp top prizes in culinary competitions.

Bistro Chopped Salad was inspired by one Kipp had at The Grill Room of the Windsor Court Hotel in New Orleans, La. Into knock offs, he was upfront about getting inspiration for his Andouille Crusted Whitefish from TV Food Network's popular chef Emeril Lagasse. The original is served at restaurant Emeril's in New Orleans.

When it comes down to good eats with meats, Kipp pointed to the 16-ounce, three-inch cut pork chop.

It's served with caramelized onions, grilled apples and light calvados cream sauce. "Simple, homey, and lip-smackin' good," he noted.

A close second is the Bleu Cheese and bacon crusted eight-ounce Filet, served with a Merlot sauce and roasted garlic mashed redskins.

The warm loaf of freshly-baked bread and all desserts are made on premise by pastry chef Sheila Nawrocki, a former instructor at the California Culinary Academy in San Francisco and former pastry chef at the Lodge at Pebble Beach, Calif.

The Bourdeaus have made Auburn Hills their home. The lure of good living in Oakland County was a draw along with the Auburn Hills Village development project that will put their bistro at the center of downtown life.

Eleanor Heald is a Troy resident who writes about dining, food, wine and spirits for the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers. To leave her a voice mail message, dial (734) 953-2047 on a touch-tone phone, mailbox 1864.

Bistro Bourdeau Uncorked

A brand-friendly list of about 50 wines offers broad choices. Chef/proprietor Kipp Bourdeau suggests the following wines with his dishes:

- Buffalo Style Gulf Coast Shrimp and Chateau Ste. Michelle Riesling
- Maple & Pecan Cured Salmon with Glass Mountain Merlot.
- Blue Cheese & Bacon Crusted Filet and Rodney Strong Cabernet Sauvignon

On the side

- A bistro can equate with noisy. At Bistro Bourdeau, wall dividers and carpeted floor areas reduce the noise factor
- For a recently opened restaurant, young, friendly and polite waitstaff have been well-trained
- Sunday Jazz Brunch beginning next month will feature regional foods. It kicks off showcasing New Orleans — Mardi Gras perfect

Bistro Bourdeau

Where: 3315 Auburn Road at Squirrel, in Auburn Hills, (248) 852-3410

Open: Lunch from 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Monday-Friday, dinner from 4-9 p.m. Monday-Thursday and until 10 p.m. Friday and Saturday. Jazz brunch from 11 a.m.-3 p.m., starting Feb. 4

Menu: American, regionally influenced comfort foods

Cost: Average lunch, $12, and dinner, $17-18

Reservations: Accepted

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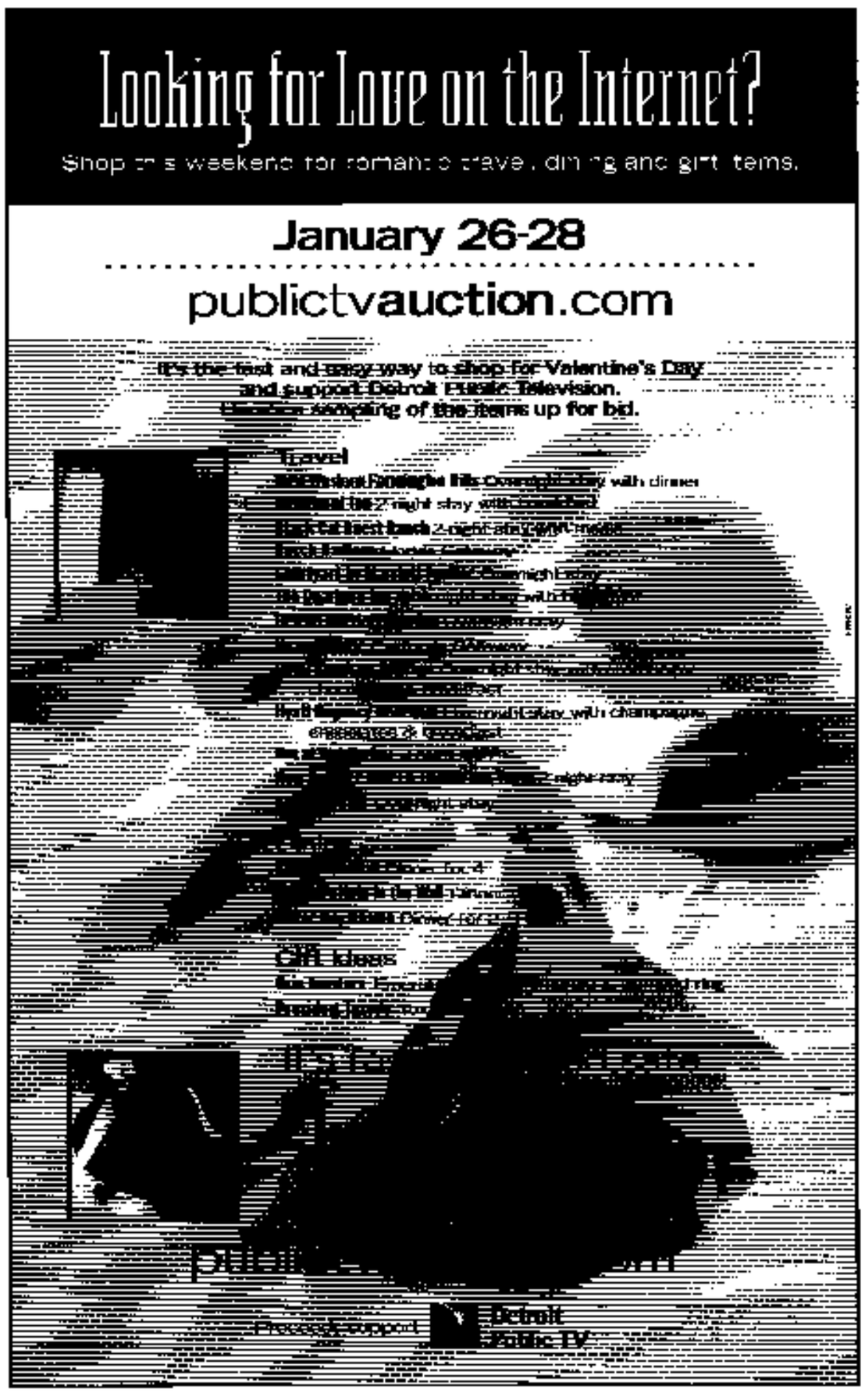
Like new: *Kipp and Susan Bourdeau toast to the recent opening of their new restaurant in Auburn Hills.*