

Eateries cater to diners, aid food bank

Fulshear grill participates in annual event

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Just like the movies, the words "my compliments to the chef" are much appreciated and will in fact bring the chef to your table - that is, if you're dining at Ray's Grill, 8502 FM 359 in Fulshear.

"He's a very creative chef," said owner [Ray Salti](#) of Executive Chef [Soren Pedersen](#).

Pedersen has been working on a menu for Houston Restaurant Week, which is Aug. 1-21.

Diners can enjoy a three-course meal for \$35, of which \$5 will be donated to the [Houston Food Bank](#).

"It's a very smart way of trying to support a local charity," Pedersen said.

The way it works is diners choose from a list of appetizers, entrees and desserts.

Pedersen's HRW appetizer menu offers jumbo lump crab cake, baby greens, or seafood chowder. For entrees, it's grilled pork chop with jalapeno creamed corn, New York strip, or roasted free-range chicken with wild rice and ratatouille.



Pedersen cooks with organic food raised by local farmers.

'Gourmet country'

He calls it "gourmet country."

"We try to enhance the food we do so you really taste it," Pedersen said. "A lot of places add heavy sauces. We want to bring out the flavor rather than cover it up."

And for dessert, choose fresh beignets with coffee ice cream, double chocolate cake or rhubarb tart with sweet crème fraiche.

"It's like anything else we do here," Pedersen said. "It's all from scratch."

During Houston Restaurant Week, more than 100 participating restaurants offer three or four-course meals while raising money for the Houston Food Bank.

Last year's event raised more than \$242,000, a number that surprised Houston Restaurant Week founder [Cleverley Stone](#).

"I was petrified last year because of the recession, and I am again this year," said Stone, host of "The Cleverley Show" on [CNN 650 Radio News](#) and contributor to Fox 26 Morning News.

"All I can do is keep repeating my mantra," Stone said. "Put the hours in, make the event happen, and keep my fingers crossed."

The first year in 2003, Stone had 16 restaurants participating and donated \$5,000.

In 2008, the event raised \$79,000. Last year it nearly tripled.

Every dollar the food bank receives provides three meals for an individual.

Stone hopes to raise at least \$240,000 again this year and has added a couple new features.

Week extended

First, Houston Restaurant Week has been extended to three weeks.

"If you can think of a better name, let me know," Stone joked. "We were just responding to demand from the restaurants and the diners. It could be 'Houston Restaurant Month' but I don't think a month is viable. I think there would be diner and chef fatigue."



Second, there is now a lunch component.

Those who lunch can choose from two-course menus for \$20 at participating restaurants, \$3 of which will be donated to the food bank.

"The timing seemed to be right to add lunch," Stone said. "I don't know if it's a trend of people who want to run out and grab lunch, or if it's the price point. Maybe in this economy it's easier to support the event from the lunch side."

Stone said lunch is optional for participating restaurants, but dinner is mandatory.

Several new restaurants are on board this year, as are some seasoned favorites.

Azuma on the Lake in Sugar Land is new to the event, with a four-course menu listing dishes such as Trio Tar-Tar, Exquisite oysters, and miso glazed Chilean sea bass.

Perry's Steakhouse & Grille is back this year, with its signature slow-roasted, caramelized pork chop - carved right at the diner's table.

Combining something new with a problem that's been around since the beginning of mankind is a winning recipe, said [Betsy Ballard](#), chief communications officer at the Houston Food Bank.

She loves the juxtaposition of Houston Restaurant Week.

"You're able to buy a meal, and at the same time you're reminded that others cannot," Ballard said. "It raises awareness in a place where people are already thinking about food."

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