



Hotel Mexico is done in "soft Jurassic Tribal Age decor."

neighborhood starts to turn around, says Arnold's owner Jim Tarbell, "people come and see its charm and character." It's not uncommon anymore to see people milling around Main past midnight.

Change across all points of the compass: To the south, Tommy Behle opens Behle Street Cafe at RiverCenter in Covington. Gumbo Charlie's, built from two Louisville barges, replaces the *Spirit of America* at Covington Landing. At the Waterfront, Jeff Ruby opens Spazzi, which features a sit-down antipasto bar and an open kitchen. ("It's my lifelong dream," says Ruby, who has hired chef Jimmy Gibson, late of Ciao Baby, to dish out food from the regions of Tuscany, Lombardy, Veneto and Lazio.) The Boot is now The Restaurant at Watertown, and J.D. Brew's is J.D.'s Malt House & Eatery. In Westwood, the Gay 90s Steakhouse paves the way for Caprese Italian Restaurant. And up north, Fairfield is the home of Seafood & Vegetarian Asian Cafe; also Cranes Chinese Restaurant. Other additions include Applewood in Aurora,

Attractions and First Run in Oxford, Chalet Restaurant in Lawrenceburg, Damon's Clubhouse-Norwood, Geoffrey's of White Oak, Hotel Mexico in Union Township, Silver Chef and Tommy's Buffet in Evendale. There's Santa Fe Steakhouse at bigg's Mall on Eastgate and Texas Roadhouse in Sharonville for steak aficionados.

And the chains. Six Boston Chicken outlets open. Bob Evans Farms premieres Cantina del Rio downtown; the Florida chain China Coast comes to Anderson Township; Texas-based Don Pablo's opens in three locations; Massachusetts-based Fuddruckers finds Anderson Township and Forest Fair Mall; Los Angeles-based Johnny Rockets in Kenwood; Atlanta's Kenny Rogers Roasters (third location) in Eastgate; San Diego's Mountain Jack's in Sharonville, the Columbus chain of Max & Erma's in Kenwood, and Louisville's Tumbleweed Mexican Food in Deerfield Township.

What about business? The reports are mixed. Some highs and some lows in Queen City

dining in '94. We hear such comments as "sales are up" and "sales slightly down" from area restaurateurs. Holding out quite well are special-occasion restaurants such as the Maisonette, which earned its five stars from *Mobil* for the thirty-first year; Orchids records a busy year, and the Palace an exceptional showing. Also strong showing for the Hyatt's Champs, the Heritage, Precinct and Grand Finale. "Maybe fine dining is making a recovery," offers Michael Forgas, co-owner of Funky's Blackstone Grille, which boasts a significant increase in '94.

Small, independent restaurants lose some business to national chains, which are popping up everywhere—from Max & Erma's to Longhorn Steaks to Don Pablo's Mexican Kitchen. In fact, nine Mexican restaurants opened in the last few months, according to Forgas, whose Funky's Border Cantina didn't fare as well as his other restaurants. The weather is a factor for some slow months at LaNormandie, Chester's Road House and the Golden Lamb, says Nat Comisar, and the chain restaurants do siphon some of the business. But people are looking for service, according to Comisar, and that's not going to come out of some corporate office in Atlanta or Dallas: "The kind we provide—and that of the Gregory family, the Bernsteins, Michael Forgas—is

different. It's special." Adds Larry Youse at Grand Finale in Glendale: "People who do business want something unique to impress their clients. I doubt whether they'll go to a Don Pablo's to do that." "If they're a high-quality chain, we want them," offers Steve McDonald of the Omni Netherland Plaza.

Unfortunately, there's a discouraging note in 1994. Some restaurants closed their kitchens for good: BBQ Shack, Birds Cafe, BK's Asia, Brass Ring Restaurant, Brodrick's Tavern, Cafe Snazzy's, China Garden Gourmet, Damon's (Florence outlet), Del Frisco's, Durango's, Dragon Inn at Swifton Commons, Double Dragon, Elms Cafe, Furman's, Gasthof Vienna, Golden Wok, Hot-Cianda, Izzy's (Evanston outlet), Noonies, New American Diner, Orient Express Chinese Restaurant, Pedro's Cactus Cantina (Middletown only), Spinning Fork (Mt. Healthy only), Tamsui, Tio's Mexican Restaurant, Ulysses, Track & Lantern and Zino's Cafe.

Onto the good news. Next time you want to take a break from your kitchen, check our *Dining Guide*, with hundreds of restaurants listed alphabetically—including menu specialties and price ranges, entertainment, reservation and credit card policies. We've indexed the restaurants by specialty, geography and entertainment.

Bon appetit!



Fuddruckers is a Massachusetts-based chain.