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FOOD

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A menu fit for Lincoln

Abraham Lincoln wasn't a picky eater. Give him a biscuit, a scrap of sausage and a cup of milk and he was content.

"He liked almost anything that could be eaten," said Wayne Temple of Springfield, a Lincoln scholar and chief deputy director of the Illinois State Archives.

"One of his favorite things growing up was cornbread and bacon. He liked frontier things. He grew up on the prairie."

Tony Leone, owner of Springfield's Pasfield House, came to the same conclusion when he was researching Lincoln's eating preferences for a Lincoln-themed dinner he threw two months ago.

"There's no descriptive food connected to him," Leone said. "Plain and simple food was just fine, so that made it difficult to know what to prepare." Venison, oyster stew, beet salad and quail on corn cakes ended up on the Pasfield House menu.

Transforming Lincoln's poor man's pantry into a \$500-a-plate dinner was the task faced by the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Foundation when it needed a menu for its upcoming fund-raising dinner celebrating the opening of the presidential museum. The event — echoing a typical state dinner during the Lincoln presidency — is planned for 600 on Monday at the Prairie Capital Convention Center.

"We knew we wanted Mary's cake for dessert," said Susan Mogerman, chief executive officer of the foundation, referring to the famous white cake that Mary Todd made for Lincoln when they were courting.

The library and museum staff researched Lincoln's eating habits and then shared the findings with the food and beverage people at the Renaissance Springfield, which is catering the event. Based on the research, the kitchen staff came up with a number of recipes, which were tasted by members of both staffs.

Oysters, a favorite of Lincoln's, were nixed.

"We all decided oysters were a bit exotic for contemporary palates," Mogerman said. Soup, a traditional start to a formal dinner in the 1860s, originally was presented in a bread bowl. Again, the bread bowl was deemed too modern and was eliminated from the menu.

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Would you buy it?

SJ-R readers test new products.

PRODUCT: Aheads Fruit Spinners

DETAILS: The fruit-leather rolls are studded with glittery Vitamin C crystals and have real fruit juice in them. Flavors are Very Berry (strawberry), Wacky Fruits (fruit punch and watermelon) and Crazy Combo (strawberry-lemon and watermelon-on-strawberry). They have no paper backing to dispose of.

MORE INFORMATION: www.aheads.com

AVAILABILITY: In supermarkets nationwide

SUGGESTED RETAIL PRICE: \$2.79 for a 4.5-ounce package of six

TESTERS: Macy Helm, 10, of Springfield; Lucas Morrison, 14, of New Berlin; and Abigail Whitrow, 12, of Sherman

COMMENTS: Our panel of testers liked the sparkly appearance and ultra-slickness. "It looks like it's coated in sugar," one said. "I think it has more flavor than regular Fruit Roll-ups," another said. "It smells good and it looks like bacon. I like bacon," said the third.

WOULD YOU ASK YOUR PARENTS TO BUY IT? Yes, they said.



Pasfield House proprietor Tony Leone, center, entertains guests during the Presidential Dinner on April 2. One of a series of such dinners that will be held at the house, the meal featured dishes popular during Thomas Jefferson's presidency.

Photographs by Justin L. Fowler/The State Journal-Register

Presidential palates

Feast like the commander in chief — right here in Springfield

By VICKY KATZ WHITAKER
 CORRESPONDENT

Thomas Jefferson would have loved the split-pea soup. In fact, he probably would have relished the julienne apple salad with sun-dried cherries, walnuts and golden raisins dressed in vinaigrette; the white chicken fricassee accompanied by his favorite vegetables; and for dessert, vanilla bean ice cream with fruit compote and "snow eggs," a light dessert of stiffly beaten, sweetened baked egg-white mounds.

"Jefferson was a pioneer in the culinary field, truly a gourmet," said Augie's Front Burner executive chef Augie Mrozowski, reviewing the menu he created for the

The price to attend the Presidential Dinner, \$50, includes hors d'oeuvre and a six-course meal.

October and John F. Kennedy in November). In 2006, he'll offer the dinners once a month, repeating the six held this year in the same months, and adding six others.

Integral to the evening were the services of about a dozen advanced students from the hospitality program at Lincoln Land Community College, who assisted with food preparation and presentation.

Program director Jay Kitterman works closely with Leone and Mrozowski in putting the series together; his students receive a lesson in upscale food service.

"This is a training and learning experience for the students. They don't have a lot of opportunity to get hands-on experience in fine dining," Kitterman said. Food is prepared at Augie's Front Burner and assembled at the Pasfield House, several blocks away, because the house does not have a full kitchen.

On the day of the dinner, Leone filled in for University of Illinois historians Cullom Davis and Phillip Shaw Paludan, who normally would alternate in providing diners with a quick overview of each president's administrative style.

"We try to keep it light, not give people a history lesson or deal with policy matters," Leone explained, prior to dinner, which was held in the home's East Conference Room. Surrounded by rich, dark chocolate-toned walls, period furnishings and a view of the Capitol, guests sat on comfortable leather banquettes and bamboo chairs. The tables were set with presidential-style fine china and crystal offset by forest-green tablecloths and matching fanned napkins.

"Jefferson was the best gourmet of all the presidents," Leone said as his guests oohed and aahed their way through the main course of tender, roasted chicken floating in a creamy sauce filled with diced, poached vegetables and mushroom slices nestled under a round, delicate fluted biscuit.

"He became the wine sommelier of the White House even when his term was over, brought back a lot of cuttings from Europe to Monticello, sought out good olive oil and introduced macaroni to America. He always said that good wine and a vegetarian diet was the success to his long life."

Jefferson died on July 4, 1826, at age 83, at a time when most people "were lucky to make it into their 50s," Leone noted, echoing a page of presidential trivia that was included in a commemorative booklet/dinner menu given to each attendee.

"All the courses were wonderful," said guest Al Zook, a view also shared by his wife, Sharon, and fellow diner Kim Villanue, all of Springfield. The three were among more than dozen or so couples and singles flanking Leone at the large table at one end of



For the April 2 dinner, Augie's Front Burner executive chef Augie Mrozowski prepared split-pea soup, one of Thomas Jefferson's favorites.

the rectangular room. Like many of the guests, they had attended the previous Presidential Dinner, enjoyed it and came back for more.

That was the case too, with Malinda and Paul Craig of Springfield, who sat at one of the smaller, more intimate tables dotting the dining room. "The food quality was excellent. There's a certain ambience here that lends an aura to an experience like this. It's hard to describe," Paul Craig said.

Friends Elaine Mayer of Springfield and Barbara Wagoner of Rochester also were back for a second time. "We're hooked," said Mayer, who with Wagoner is a volunteer at the new Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum and Library.

Leone hopes that kind of praise spreads, making what will become the first-Saturday-of-each-month series a year-round sellout attracting area residents and tourists alike.

The dinners, he adds, also can be staged for private groups such as the Confrerie de la Chaine des Rotisseurs, an international gastronomic society which, thanks to Kitterman, a member, held what amounted to a test-run of the Lincoln Presidential Dinner the night before it was open to the public. Leone hopes to add a full kitchen to Pasfield House so the food preparation can be on the premises in the future.

When Leone, a contract lobbyist and former chief clerk of the Illinois House of Representatives, bought the Pasfield House six years ago from a fellow lobbyist to use as an office, he said the building was "on life support," carved up into nine outdated apartments.

"It would have been cheaper to tear it down, but I fell in love with it."

Today the manse, which once sat on 40 acres, is a bed-and-breakfast popular with elected representatives who stay in Springfield for the legislative session. It also is used for numerous private receptions.

TJ Apple Salad, Augie's Version

From Augie Mrozowski
 2 Red Delicious apples
 1 Granny Smith apple
 1/2 cup walnut halves
 1/2 cup golden raisins
 3/4 cup sun-dried cherries
 1/2 cup sugar
 Juice from 1 or 2 lemons, depending on juiciness
 1/4 cup red wine vinegar

Julienne the three apples or slice with a mandoline into small strips. Combine the remaining ingredients and mix. Let rest in the refrigerator for 2 to 3 hours. Serve on a leaf or two of butter or Bibb lettuce. Garnish with half of a palmier (sugar-dusted puff pastry). Serves 4.

Per serving: 390 calories, 4 g protein, 77 g carbohydrate, 10 g fat, 0 mg cholesterol, 7 g fiber, 10 mg sodium.

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