



LIVING

FOOD & DRINK

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eating
news & notes

'Game & Gun' dinner

Charlie Palmer Steak in Grand Sierra Resort is playing host to a "Game & Gun" dinner beginning at 6 p.m. on Jan. 22. The dinner features Beretta shotguns presented at a sparkling wine and canapé reception, followed by fish, fowl and game courses paired with wines from Palmina winery. Cost: \$195 inclusive of tax and tip. Details and required reservations: 775-789-2456 or 775-789-2458. The dinner takes place during Safari Club International's Annual Hunters' Convention, which runs Jan. 21 through 24 in Reno.

NEW YEAR'S EVE DEAL

Lobster: Café Sierra in Grand Sierra Resort is serving a soup or salad, whole Maine lobster or prime rib, baked Alaska and glass of house wine dinner from 4 p.m. to midnight through Sunday. Cost: \$15.95 plus tax. Details: 775-789-2000.

BELGIAN BEER

Pairing: Bistro 7, 7111 S. Virginia St., is serving a tasting menu pairing five courses with Belgian beer from 5:30 to 9 p.m. Jan. 8. Highlights: Sausage and mustard trio matched with Gouden Carolus Noël and mussels steamed in Delirium Tremmens. Cost: \$55. Reservations: 775-851-9463.

ORGANIC GARDENING

Workshops: The River School, 7777 White Fir St., is offering a series of 11 workshops on planning an organic garden, starting seedlings, raising chickens, composting, soil and bedding, planting and more. The workshops run from 1 to 3 p.m. on various Saturdays beginning Jan. 10 and going through May 23. Cost: \$10 drop-in per class or \$90 for the series. Details and registration: www.riverschool.info or 775-747-3910.

NEW CATERER

Intimate: Stephanie Sinner, a talented longtime local chef, has started Chefanie's Catering. Sinner specializes in parties of 10 or fewer, including dinners for two, wine and sparkling wine service, small buffets and fondue. Details: 775-313-4901 or sinner.08@hotmail.com.

—Johnathan L. Wright, RGJ

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REMEMBRANCE OF PLATES PAST

The RGJ's review crew shares its favorite restaurant dishes from 2008

BY JOHNATHAN L. WRIGHT
AND LAURA LONGERO
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Unlike 2007 — when big kahuna Charlie Palmer Steak and a slew of ethnic restaurants opened — 2008 was a relatively quiet year in local dining. Put that down to rising fuel and food prices most of the year and an economy off the boil.

Still, there was much good grub to be found. And constrained by space considerations, we found it difficult to choose just 15 dishes to represent the highlights of a year's worth of eating out.

Many of our choices were tried during restaurant reviews; others we enjoyed during "civilian" forays about town. We wanted our list to encompass a variety of prices and cuisines.

All our selections were delicious — that was a basic requirement. But beyond that, each offered something more: spectacular plating, the union of unexpected ingredients, an unfamiliar cooking tradition, local sourcing, or simply being

SEE BEST DISHES ON 5D

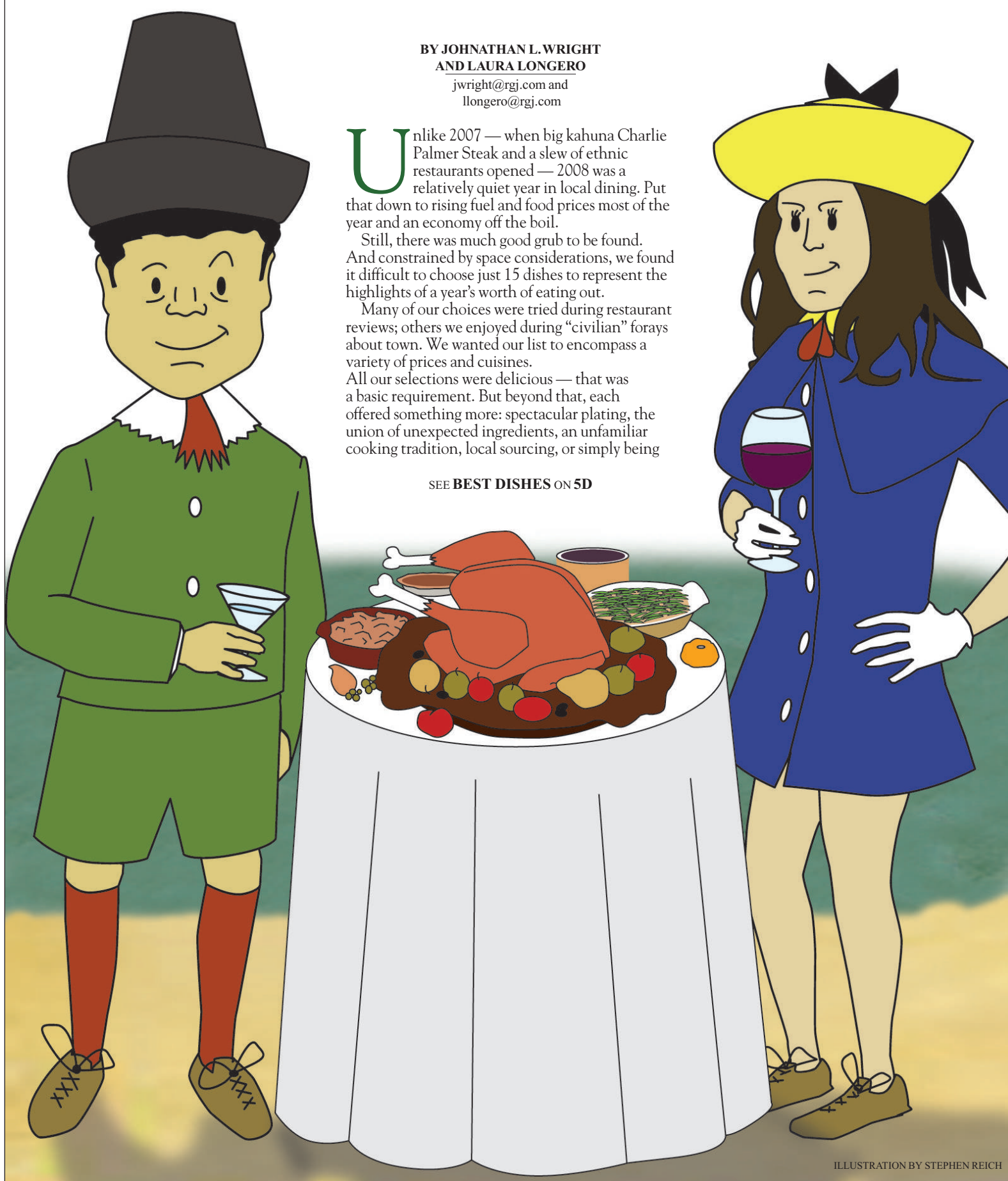


ILLUSTRATION BY STEPHEN REICH

A.M. convenience to start the New Year

New Year's Day — not the time most of us want to fuss with breakfast. The solution: Jennifer Bushman's "Make It Easy" eggnog toast, which soaks overnight in the fridge in leftover holiday nog; in the morning, simply fry up thick slices to golden and pass the syrup and powdered sugar.

For folks who indulged on New Year's Eve, make a hair o' the dog version with adult eggnog and Grand Marnier (and whip up a few Mimosas while you're at it). For kiddie toast, use non-alcoholic nog and omit the liqueur.

EGGNOG TOAST
2 cups prepared eggnog



ON THE WEB

See Jennifer make the recipe at RGJ.com/MakeItEasy



2 large eggs, beaten
1 teaspoon vanilla
2 tablespoons Grand Marnier (optional)



RICHARD STOKES/RENO GAZETTE-JOURNAL

Drizzle the finished toast with maple syrup and dust with powdered sugar. You can top with fruit, too.

1 (1-pound) loaf day old French bread OR egg bread, sliced into 1-inch-thick slices, then ends sliced off to create squares
1/2 cup (1 stick/8 tablespoons) unsalted butter,

divided
Maple syrup, warmed
Powdered sugar for garnish
Whisk eggnog, eggs, vanilla and Grand Marnier (if using) together in medium bowl. Place bread slices into 9-inch by

13-inch baking dish, enough to fill. Pour egg mixture over slices and let soak about 10 minutes. Turn slices over, cover dish with plastic wrap and place in refrigerator. Refrigerate overnight.

The next morning, melt 5 tablespoons butter in large sauté pan. Add bread slices and cook until golden brown, being careful not to crowd pan, turning slices once. Remove from pan and drain on paper towels; slices may be kept warm on cookie sheet in 200 F oven. Repeat with the remaining slices. Serve with remaining butter, maple syrup and dusting of powdered sugar. Serves 4 to 6.

—Johnathan L. Wright, RGJ

Biscotti's

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Best dishes/Brownie burger, monkfish cheek included

From 1D
an outstanding example of its type. No list is comprehensive, and many worthy dishes couldn't be acknowledged here. Two thousand nine promises to be challenging for restaurants. According to industry predictions, when inflation is accounted for, restaurants will experience negative growth. With that in mind, we hope that you join us, to the extent possible, in supporting independent local establishments. Northern Nevada would be less (and far less tasty) without them.

(Note: Restaurant dishes are not ranked. They appear in alphabetical order of their originating restaurant.)

CHOCOLATE BROWNIE BURGER AT BISTRO NAPA: Look again. That's not a slider with fries before you. It's actually a dessert composed of a chocolate brownie "burger" on a doughnut "bun," mango "fries" and strawberry sauce "ketchup." Mimicry never tasted so good. In the Atlantis Casino Resort Spa, 3800 S. Virginia St., 335-4539. (Johnathan L. Wright).

MOUNTAIN MAN CHILI FROM BUTCHER BOY PRIME: Hunters know the pleasure and versatility of elk. Butcher Boy's chili features diced elk, red and green peppers, onions and pinto beans (yes, I'm a fan of beans in chili) in spicy tomato broth. It's a hearty (soup? stew?) perfect for blustery days. 7300 S. Virginia St., 359-7445, ext. 5. (Laura Longero).

PEKING DUCK AT CAIE'S ORIENTAL CAFÉ: When Peking duck arrives — sliced, meaty, juicy with the pop! of bursting duck fat — owner CaiE George often spreads pancakes with duck sauce for customers, tucks in fowl and graces all with slivered scallions. The pancakes aren't the usual spongy specimens; they're homemade and thin enough

my fingers leave imprints. 770 S. Meadows Parkway, in the Smith's shopping center, 853-9668. (JLW).

FILET OF CERTIFIED ANGUS BEEF FROM CHARLIE PALMER STEAK: Many of executive chef David Holman's most inventive dishes can be found on the Steak bar menu and on the menu of Fin Fish, Steak's sister restaurant. But I bypassed those (including a deeply fresh, vibrant Pacific prawn ceviche) in favor of a filet of Certified Angus Beef because its crusted exterior and blushing pink interior convinced this indifferent beef eater that steak is sometimes worth ordering. In Grand Sierra Resort, 2500 E. Second St., 789-2456 or 789-2458. (JLW).

POLENTA, MELANZANE E POMODORO FROM JOHNNY'S RISTORANTE ITALIANO: This appetizer is a tower of silky polenta layered with velvety slices of grilled eggplant and juicy tomatoes. It's topped with basil, melting fontina cheese and drizzles of rich truffle oil. Bliss. 4245 W. Fourth St., 747-4511. (LL).

PAPPARDELLE WITH VARIOUS SAUCES FROM LA STRADA: One evening, chef Ivano Centemeri might toss homemade ribbons of pappardelle in tomato sauce studded with sweet chunks of lobster and scallops; another night, a brawny rabbit ragu coats the pasta snarl. If the menu doesn't offer the pappardelle you want, do as the regulars do and ask for something special. In the Eldorado Hotel Casino, 345 N. Virginia St., 786-5700. (JLW).

LUMP CRAB SKILLET CAKE FROM LULOU'S RESTAURANT: Troy Cannan, LuLou's co-owner and founding chef, is the new executive chef of the Eldorado Hotel Casino and isn't in LuLou's regularly anymore. But you'd never know it from this rich but still light admixture of crab, caramelized sunchokes



RICHARD STOKES/RENO GAZETTE-JOURNAL

Look again. This dish isn't a slider with fries. It's actually a dessert, served at the new Bistro Napa in the Atlantis Casino Resort Spa, composed of a chocolate brownie "burger" on a doughnut "bun," mango "fries" and strawberry dipping sauce "ketchup." A root beer float shooter adds to the sweet assemblage.



DAVID B. PARKER/RENO GAZETTE-JOURNAL

A filet of Certified Angus Beef, sliced to reveal its juicy interior, is among the cuts served at Charlie Palmer Steak in Grand Sierra Resort.

(playfully mimicking the crab a bit), crème fraîche and truffle oil. Lick. 1470 S. Virginia St., 329-9979. (JLW).

BEAN AND SHREDDED BEEF STEW FROM PARISA'S CUISINE: The restaurant serves this dish at its weekend Persian buffet, some of the only regularly available Middle Eastern food in Northern Nevada. Sprinkles of fried garlic and mint transform the soup from a merely satisfying bowl to a sweet-smoky standout. 380 Freeport Blvd., Sparks, 359-5545 or 815-1479. (JLW).

SEZMU: Chef and co-owner Larry Dunning has a sly sense of culinary humor, and I love this witty play on classic surf-and-turf. And the use of tender fish cheeks — some consider them the best part of the fish — is in keeping with Dunning's commitment to sustainable food practices like using the whole animal. 670 Mt. Rose St., 327-4448. (JLW).

CHICKEN TORTILLA SOUP FROM SÛP: Bowls of this elixir brim with shreds of roast chicken and cheese and deliver subtle smokiness and perfectly pitched heat; tortilla triangles, added just in time, are pliable but never soggy. SÛp's cozy storefront space only adds to the charm of its food. I (almost) don't even mind the lines. 719 S. Virginia St., 324-4787. (JLW).

HANGOVER HELPER OMELET FROM SQUEEZE IN: It's difficult to choose from the 60 or so omelets offered at this essential Reno breakfast joint, but choose you must. The plump, fluffy exterior of this monstrous omelet conceals chunks of ham and sausage, crisp bacon and melted cheddar and jack cheeses. And don't forget the Otis spudz — home fries with onions and cheese. 5020 Las Brisas Blvd., 787-2700. (LL).

KEY WAT FROM ZAGOL ETHIOPIAN RESTAURANT: Clarified butter beautifully enriches a stew of beef and red chilis while simultaneously balancing its heat. Grab the stew with pieces of spongy injera flatbread. Ye doro wat — chicken braised in red chili sauce to fall-from-the-bone tenderness — is a close second for Zagol's best dish of 2008. 855 E. Fourth St., at Morrill Avenue, just east of the Wells Avenue overpass, 786-9020. (JLW).

COCONUT CAKE FROM PIPER'S PATISSERIE: This spring dessert, one of my favorites, proves the adage that "you eat with your eyes." The statuesque beauty is a virginal-looking confection of moist white cake layered with custard, blanketed in thick butter cream frosting and covered with coconut flakes. Pass the knife. 10068 Donner Pass Road, Truckee, 530-582-2256. (LL).

CAESAR SALAD FROM ROXY: Caesar salad is a quintessential steak house menu item, and Roxy has one of the best in town. Whole leaves of crisp baby romaine are drizzled with piquant Caesar dressing, then topped with Spanish white anchovies; a long, thin, buttery croûton; and shavings of fresh Parmesan cheese. In the Eldorado Hotel Casino, 345 N. Virginia St., 786-5700. (LL).

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