


**HINTS
FROM
HELOISE**

The taste of coming home

Dear Heloise: It happens every time we return from a long trip, coming home to find a cold house and an empty refrigerator. We're hungry and seeking homemade comfort food as we recover from lack of sleep and the fatigue of travel. Of course, we're not at all up to a market run. But this time, I thought ahead.

Before leaving on our European vacation, I made a big pot of our favorite homemade soup and froze it. I also froze some of my special homemade bread. When we came in from the airport after being away for a month, I nuked the soup just enough to thaw it, then dumped it right into the slow cooker and turned it on. I set the bread out to thaw and warm. In no time, our house smelled like home, and we had steaming-hot comfort food to welcome us back without having to make a trip to the market. — **Nancy S. in California**

Rinsed onions

Dear Heloise: I chopped some onions and wanted to rinse them but thought, "Why use that big colander and have those small chunks get lost or stuck?" Lo and behold, right on the kitchen counter was my coffee maker with a strainer basket. I dumped the chopped onions into the basket and rinsed. Nobody complained about onion-flavored coffee the next morning, either! — **John B., via email**

Salt shakedown

Dear Readers: Have you noticed on cooking shows that when a chef adds a "pinch" of salt to a recipe, it's not in a shaker?

Historically, a saltcellar (a metal or glass container with a small spoon) was used for holding salt. Salt was a commodity and a luxury in the 15th and 16th centuries, so it was treated as such. Usually a large or exceptionally beautiful saltcellar was used as a table decoration. To be seated "below" the saltcellar was a sign of lower status.

Oversalting a dish can happen without thinking. If salt is added to hot or cooking foods, the dish does not taste as salty as it really is. Hold off on adding more. It's better to undersalt the dish and let individuals add salt if they want. — **Heloise**

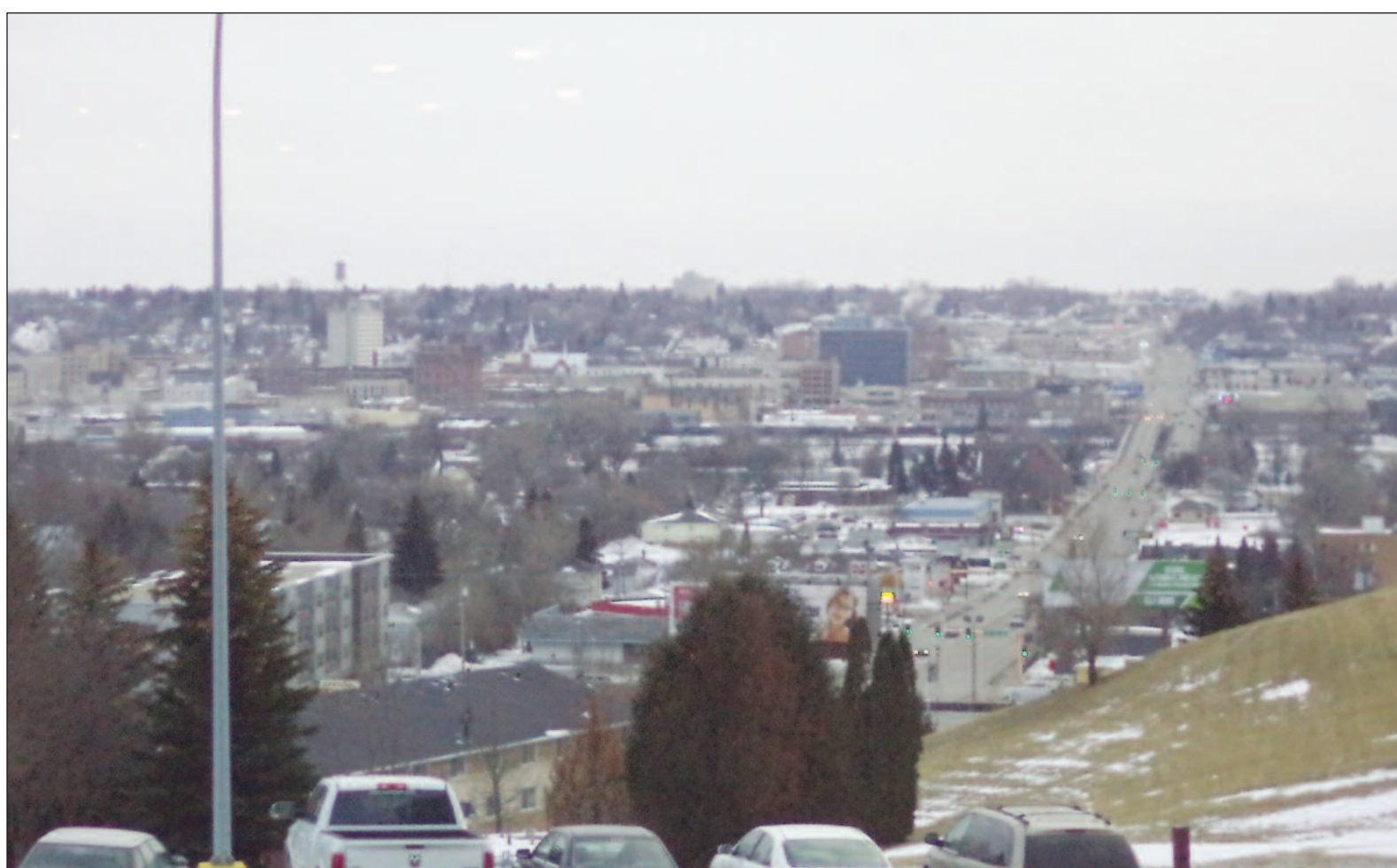
Timed cooking

Dear Heloise: I often use a timer on my slow cooker. It ensures that the slow cooker gets turned off if I'm delayed. If I don't want it to cook the entire time I'm away, it can be started an hour or so after I leave. — **Sandra P., via email**

Remember, there is a two-hour "window" for food-safety concerns. You could delay by only two hours, or finish cooking and having the dish "stand" only two hours. — **Heloise**

Tomato salad

Dear Heloise: A recent letter about canned tomatoes in salads reminded me how my late mother-in-law would often make a salad. She also used canned tomatoes: She would drain the juice and mix the tomatoes with vinegar, salt and pepper to make a simple dressing. — **Jon R., via email**



John Bechtel/Special to MDN

From the dining room at the Primo Restaurant, guests have a stunning view of Minot

A Primo experience

By **JOHN BECHTEL**

Special to The Minot
Daily News

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Eating can be a habit, an obsession, an adventure, a chore or a bore.

Most of us at one time or another have eaten a meal and a half hour later can't remember what we ate and certainly not how it tasted. It was not something we savored or lingered over. We ate because it was that time of day, or we ate so we could feel full again or because our family or friends were eating. We were not thinking about our food when we were chewing it. Our minds were somewhere else.

We dine out for social reasons, to be with friends, to save time on preparation and clean-up or a desire for variety in our cuisine. Sometimes we just want to be waited on for a change. And sometimes we want others to do for us what we are presently too tired to do for ourselves. Sometimes we dine out to give a break to the traditional food preparers in our family. And sometimes we food preparers are looking for fresh ideas how to prepare and serve the foods we traditionally provide to our households. But whatever our reasons for being there, since we are paying for the experience, doesn't it make good sense to make the most of the experience and truly enjoy every aspect of it?

This new column that will be appearing biweekly in this paper is for everyone with food on their mind, either because you are hungry and wondering where to go or you want to discover some hidden hole-in-the-wall gem of an eatery that somehow escaped your notice before now. The restaurant business is a tough one. Imagine you are in a large extended family and you invited everyone over for dinner but have no idea how many are actually coming? Five or fifty? If you prepare too much, you have a lot of food to throw away. If you



John Bechtel/Special to MDN

Terry Dutenhafer is one of three chefs that prepare delicious meals at Primo Restaurant. The meals range from sandwiches and salads to seafood and steak.

prepare too little, you have a lot of hungry faces looking at you expectantly.

I counted 81 different restaurant locations in the SRT phone book for the Minot area. That's one restaurant for about every 570 residents. That's a lot of competition for restaurant owners. And for the rest of us, that's a lot of choices.

Hopefully this column will help you find some favorite places. When you do, be sure to let those who prepare and serve your food know you enjoyed the experience. There is no greater compliment you can pay your chefs than to let them know you really tasted, savored and liked their food preparations. For this reason, for each

restaurant we review, we will tell you the names of those who prepare your menu selections and a little about them. We will also ask them to share with us one of their favorite recipes that we can try at home if we choose.

I have never heard of a chef who resented being requested to appear at a table of appreciative customers. As unseen performers, they enjoy a curtain call as much as anyone.

Unlike chefs, your servers earn a significant portion of their total income from tips. For acceptable service, a 15 percent tip is the norm; for superior service 20 percent is recommended. If the service was below par, I would suggest either request to speak with management, or leave less than 15 percent but always with a polite note that you were not satisfied with the service. Saying nothing but leaving a poor or no tip risks leaving the server with the notion that their service was acceptable but that you were a cheap customer. Most servers want to please and deserved praise reinforces good service.

Primo Restaurant

Location: 1505 North Broadway, at the crest of North Hill and inside the Grand Hotel

Type: Fine dining. Italian-American cuisine with an emphasis on steaks and pasta.

Chefs: Gary Lundt, Aaron Carr, Terry Dutenhafer

Hours of Operation: Open every day except Christmas. Monday through Thursday: 7 a.m. to 10 p.m.; Friday and Saturday: 7 a.m. to 11 p.m.; Sunday 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. Sunday Brunch: 9:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Sunday Brunch prices: \$14.95; seniors \$11.95; children \$5.95

Prices: Between family casual and fine dining. Worth the money.

This restaurant is inside the

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The Primo Restaurant can accept small and large crowds at the restaurant inside the Grand Hotel.

John Bechtel/Special to MDN

Primo

Continued from Page C1

hotel. You walk 50 feet into the lobby, turn left and go up a set of stairs. There is a counter there and a discreet sign. The hotel has been there more than 50 years. The restaurant was added a few years later. The dining room, which is quietly elegant, seats 100, and arguably has the best view of the city of any restaurant in town.

The restaurant is family-friendly, and is well lit. You don't need to use your smart phone to read the menu. There is no music to compete with your conversation. There is no dress code, and you will see white collar snappy and clean jeans. Reservations are suggested, except for New Year's Eve and Valentine's Day. Walk-ins are welcome, but you may occasionally have to wait in line. The restrooms are outside the restaurant proper and down a hotel hallway. They are modern and clean. In the dining room, there are black linen table cloths and wine-red napkins. There is a hostess, and servers are in uniform. The servers are experienced and knowledgeable, but there is no sommelier to open the bottle of wine and sniff your cork.

The menu is extensive and is hard-bound. There are about a dozen appetizers to choose from, and a comprehensive steak menu that tops out at about \$34. There are chicken, pork, and pasta entrees, ranging in price from \$14.95 to \$20.95. There are eight Quick Entrees for those in a hurry, ranging in price from \$8.75 to \$13.95. They have a hot and cold sandwich page. The significant, moderately priced wine selection, with 36 different labels available by the glass, range in price from \$4.25 to \$20.95 a glass. Bottles of wine are available, and there is a full bar including cocktails and a selection of single malt scotch whiskeys.

The bar is almost invisible. Look for a dark glass door on your left as you descend the stairs to leave. What you might have mistaken for a broom closet opens into a big room, complete with a blackjack table, with profits going to Minot State University for student scholarships. The bar is open from 6 p.m. to 1 a.m.

Claim to fame

They make their own French bread. From scratch. No bought or frozen dough. They use North Dakota flour. They also make their own compound butters (butter plus one other ingredient such as honey).

They cut their ribeyes, New York strip steaks and tenderloins in-house.

They have an extraordinarily stable workforce. The chefs and salad manager have exactly 100 years of experience combined just at Primo's! At least three of the servers have been in the restaurant industry for more than 40 years, most of it as dining room staff. There are younger ones, too, including college students majoring in theater and pre-law. They all speak highly of the family feeling among the staff.

The chefs

Gary Lundt, the culinary godfather of Primo, has been there 40 years. Gary is self-taught, and won first place at the North Dakota State Fair chef's competition two years in a row, 2004-2005. Gary handles buffets and banquets. Unfortunately, he recently fell on the ice and broke both his arm and collarbone. His co-workers say it will be hard to keep him out of the kitchen.

Aaron Carr, married and the father of three adopted children has a bachelor of science degree in information technology and an associates degree in culinary arts from Sullivan University in Lexington, Ky. Carr's avocation is tae kwon do, and he is working his way through his certifications. He and his wife have traveled to London, Paris, Geneva,



John Bechtel/Special to MDN

One of the most popular meals at Primo Restaurant is the Chicken Cordon Bleu.

Russia (far east), South Korea and the Bahamas. He has been an Eagle Award winner from the Minot Area Chamber of Commerce for outstanding customer service.

Terry Dutenhafer has worked at Primo's for 30 years. Although never having attended culinary school, Dutenhafer says he got a great education from a consultant from the Culinary Institute of New York some years back and of course, decades of learning on the job. In 1999 Dutenhafer was a top-10 finalist in the North Dakota Wheat Commission's Bread Winner contest. Dutenhafer handles meat cutting and is responsible for much of the cross training of kitchen staff that is the source of their consistency in food preparation. Dutenhafer has written more than 400 recipes.

My experience with Primo

I chose this restaurant to write about first because it was the first restaurant my wife and I ate at when we came to Minot three years ago. We have been back many times, because for us at least, Primo bats 1.000. We've never had a bad meal or poor service. The staff is very personable but remains unobtrusive. The homemade French bread is wonderful, especially

dipped in olive oil, ground pepper and grated parmesan cheese.

Our favorite entree is the tenderloin steak with gorgonzola cheese melted on top with fresh vegetables grilled with the same seasoning they use on the steak. We always split this entree, which is bigger than either one of us can handle alone, which also transforms our selection from the most expensive item on the menu to a bargain. The chefs cook a steak to order, and they know what medium-rare means, which is important to us. The servers and the kitchen coordinate well, so you never get two or more courses delivered to the table simultaneously, resulting in crowding the table, and one course getting cold while you're finishing another.

Also worthy of mention are their salads, which are fresh, tasty and colorful. There are several flagship salads, my favorite being the Gorgonzola Citrus Salad. At \$10.95, it is a bargain and a meal in itself. Its ingredients: mixed greens, marinated chicken breast, dried cranberries, candied pecans, gorgonzola cheese crumbles, mandarin orange segments, and poppy seed dressing. Or try their Raspberry Walnut Chicken Salad or Apricot Chicken Salad. Their tomato bisque

soup is also a favorite.

For those who love a bargain (who doesn't?), there is a small section of their menu that is easy to miss called Prime Celebrations. On Mondays, there is a standard 15 percent off all pasta dishes and half-price family platters. Their family platters will feed two to three people, and often more. Half price on these has to be one of the best food bargains in town. They have other specials for Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday.

For me, Primo restaurant is the essence of North Dakota: sturdy, consistent, unpretentious. Friendly but not intrusive. They have

maintained a quality food operation for almost half a century, when many others failed to stay in business. They still pay attention to details. I think many people are not aware of them because they are hidden inside the hotel, instead of being a stand-alone restaurant.

Please send comments or suggestions to John Bechtel, care of this paper, or by email to jbechtel@thenewvoltage.com. Our reviews will be limited to fine dining and casual dining. Casual dining typically has moderately priced food, with table service, in a casual atmosphere. They typically have a full bar

ALFREDO SAUCE

- Servings: 4
 - 3/4 ounce garlic
 - 1 fluid ounce olive oil
 - 1/2 cup white wine
 - 1/4 gallon heavy cream
 - 1/4 cup lemon juice
 - 1/4 fluid ounce tabasco sauce
 - 1/8 pound parmesan cheese
 - 1/8 pound Romano cheese
 - 1 1/2 tablespoons arrowroot powder
- Put olive oil and garlic in large sauce pan; soften under medium heat. Deglaze pan with white wine. Add lemon juice and heavy cream and reduce by 1/3. Thicken cream with arrowroot; add parmesan and romano cheeses. Season to taste with salt, pepper and Tabasco. Add to pasta and meats of your choosing.

with separate bar staff, a larger beer menu and a limited wine menu. Chain examples of this might be Olive Garden and Applebee's. We will include some chain outlets, but will reserve special focus on locally owned single units. We figure most people know the fast food (think MacDonalds, Taco Bell or Pizza Hut) and fast casual (think Chipotle Mexican Grill or Panera bread) food outlets are, and what to expect there. The same applies to family style restaurants, where diners typically serve themselves. Our reviews

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Olson Family Dental

 Dr. David Olson is proud to announce that his daughter, Dr. Megan Olson, joined his dental practice in July 2014. She is a recent graduate of Creighton University School of Dentistry and is currently accepting new patients.
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