

Restaurant Review 20 Cheshire Inn Thanksgiving Buffett November 27, 2014

**FOOD: GREAT EXPECTATIONS...DISMAL RESULTS:** When my wife and I lived in Washington, DC it was very pleasant around Thanksgiving and Christmas. I normally had to work around the holidays either as a cop or a sportswriter. This meant we never returned to St. Louis for the holidays...this meant no large group of relatives and no stress of fixing large holiday feasts. We would go to Jean Louis Palladin's restaurant in the Watergate Hotel. It may have been a bit out of our normal price range, but it was a treat and a present to ourselves.



Chef Jean Louis Palladin, who died at age 55 in 2001. The location of his famous DC restaurant.

It was the Thanksgiving of 2012, after having been back in St. Louis for almost seven years. We hosted a Thanksgiving dinner for my wife's family. We had turkey and beef tenderloin with all the fixing. But once everything was spread out and everyone worked through the line was seated at our dining room table there was one thing in common, the very good food was cold. The other thing thing was there were several loads of dishes to do.

In 2013 I decided we were eating out on Thanksgiving. I checked the restaurant menus that were serving dinner and decided on the Cheshire Inn on Clayton Road at McCausland/Skinker.



**2013** Dinner in 2013 included my wife, he sister and husband, a niece and another sister from Jefferson City.

The turkey dinner was \$25; salmon was \$28 and prime rib was \$35. The meals included a salad or soup and a dessert. Our Thanksgiving dinners were great! The staff was excellent. The food was delicious and it was hot. The other thing was that we were full but not stuffed after going back and forth to the buffet line. Everyone commented on how great the experience was. We were already looking ahead to Turkey Day 2014.



There was stuffing hiding under the turkey. The portions were perfect sizes even the prime rib in 2013.

**2014** In early November I called to make reservations and told the person on the phone how great our experience was 2013. A niece, nephew, my wife's youngest sister, husband and their two 21-year old-plus kids joined us along with former Chesterfield patch.com editor Jean Whitney, who was spending her last Thanksgiving in town before selling her Chesterfield house and moving to Arizona. Someone from the Cheshire called back in a few days and reconfirmed the reservation. I again mentioned how much we enjoyed our meals in 2013.

**YIKES** Here is what neither person mentioned. There would not be table service and individual meals starting at \$25 in 2014 were gone. It was going to be a buffet and the price was going to be \$55 a person. You might think 110-percent increase in price might be something worth mentioning! I thought that in 1994 when we were paying \$45 a person for a buffet at Jean Louis, so maybe this would be alright. It wasn't.

Dinner in one year did a total 180-degree turn around. There are basic rules if you are at a \$55 a person buffet. **Rule 1** Do Not Fill Up on Salads! **Rule 2** Do not eat bread! It is pointless to fill up on the least costly items and have no room for the expensive stuff.

**Rule 3** Try and get to items right after they are brought out or if the serving dish has been on the buffet line, dig deep if you want warm food.

In this case you could have violated Rules 1 and 2 because much of the expensive stuff was not very good. On the positive side, our drink waiter, Eric who also kept the table clean was excellent. But once again the buffet created extra stress. Do you leave a 20-percent tip or just a 10-percent one since you are serving yourself?

The start with the cold seafood found the featured and most popular items to be shrimp and oysters on the half shell. The shrimp was just okay and was getting a little tired after thawing. The shrimp at Costco are much better. The oyster lovers at the table did enjoy the the offerings.



The main meat dishes included not the delicious prime rib served in 2013, but carved sirloin, ham and turkey. Our first try at the sirloin found it dry, tough and at room temperature. A return trip with a request to to slice it thin, resulted in a better tasting experience with very rare meat. The turkey didn't have much taste and was dry.



The garlic mash potatoes we tried on the first trip were cold. A ladle of warm gravy helped on another serving. The highlight of our first plate was the green bean casserole with canned green beans, cream of mushroom soup and French's onion rings. It was the only hot item on the plate.

Jean Whitney liked the roast autumn vegetables and wild mushroom risotto.

The biggest and strangest event was after I got a piece of pan fried chicken breast. The amazingly thin piece of meat was so tough that you could not cut it. I mean I was sawing at it with no positive results. Eric was refilling water glasses at the time and I called him over.

"Eric, does this seem strange to you," I asked as I sawed away.

"Would you like for me to get you another knife sir," was his response which caused everyone at the table to break out in laughter.

Once I finally managed to get a small piece cut away it was impossible to eat unless Eric was ready to Heimlich a fat guy.



The piece of chicken so tough it could not be cut or eaten is to the side of the very rare and thinly sliced sirloin and behind the tasteless mashed potatoes only made warm by a ladle full of gravy.

No one at the table had the guts to try the Brown Sugar and Maple Syrup Roasted Sweet Potatoes with spiced marshmallows. However one of the fewer positive notes was the Jean raved about the Butternut Squash soup.

**Desserts:** Of the nine desserts, they were pushing the pecan pie as it was offered at two dessert tables. The hot dessert was the Chocolate Gooey Butter Bread Pudding.

Frankly the pecan pie at Charlotte's Rib is 100 times better than the almost tasteless slices being offered at the Cheshire. Actually the Tippin Pecan Pies at Dierbergs are also much better.

Maybe the saddest picture of the day was the uneaten pecan pie and chocolate bread pudding on the plate of a fat guy.



If you noticed I did not have any comments from my wife Diana on the food. There is a simple reason. After we got into the car and as I was pulling off the Cheshire parking lot she made a definitive statement.

"That was awful!"

At this time last year we had vowed to return to the Cheshire for all other Thanksgivings. Now we have vowed never again to return to the Cheshire anytime in the year.