

FOOD



FOOD STUFF

IN YOUR GRILL –

Koegel's, a family-owned and operated sausage manufacturer based in Michigan, wants to remind you as we enter the grilling season that their company's meat products are made the old-fashioned way, using the same distinctive recipes Albert Koegel started the company with in 1916. The Flint-based company produces and distributes more than 6,500 tons of frankfurters and lunch meats every year. For more information about Koegel's viennas, skinless franks, Polish and Italian sausages, bratwurst and dinner franks, or to find area retailers carrying Koegel products, please visit www.koegelmeats.com.

SWELL SWILLS –

The Detroit Wine Organization will host a "Wine Down Wednesday" event at the Majestic Café. The tasting will pit California vs. Washington state in what's billed as a "West Coast Showdown," with a range of each state's best offerings. On Wednesday, May 30 at 4120 Woodward Ave., Detroit; tickets are \$40, \$35 for DWO members. For more information, see detroitwine.org.

SCHOOL LUNCHES –

Henry Ford Community College's Hospitality Studies program is holding its annual series of International Buffet lunches in its student-staffed restaurant. The \$12 buffets will be offered at 11:15 a.m., noon and 12:30 p.m. on May 24, May 31, June 14 and June 21 at Henry Ford Community College's Student and Culinary Arts Center at 5101 Evergreen Rd., Dearborn; call 313-845-9651 for reservations.

Know of any new restaurants, special dinners or food-related events? Let us know. Send materials two weeks in advance to Food Stuff, Metro Times, 733 St. Antoine, Detroit, MI 48226 or e-mail mjackman@metrotimes.com.

Frijoles off the freeway

Grand Azteca I

321 W. 14 Mile Rd., Madison Heights
248-733-9662

Handicap Accessible
Entrées: \$6.50-\$13.25

by Mel Small

"OK" was the response of my three dinner partners to their meal at Grand Azteca, the Mexican restaurant on Fourteen Mile Road opposite Oakland Mall. That doesn't sound like much of a recommendation, but before you stop reading, ask yourself how many local burrito bars merit more than an OK? In any event, the owners, brothers Silviano, Ramon and Gulmaro Arellano must be doing something right because in the four short years since they opened their first location, they've cloned Grand Aztecas in Warren, Fraser and Waterford.

They began by redecorating a former Denny's in Madison Heights with riotous pastels and filled the walls, nooks and crannies of their two sprawling dining spaces with virtually every imaginable piece of Mexican kitsch. And although the Arellanos began their restaurant career south of the border, they decided to stick to familiar Tex-Mex fare in this country. Their menu is dominated by tacos, burritos, enchiladas, nachos and fajitas with the spice and fire level toned down for tender Midwestern palates.

Indeed, there is virtually no heat in the salsa and ranch dressing (!) accompanying the generous basket of warm tortilla chips that welcomes diners. This is balanced somewhat by the slightly more sprightly white pimento-like cheese that adorns the basic nacho (\$4). That nacho virtually disappears beneath chicken, mounds of shredded iceberg, tomatoes, sour cream and a smooth guacamole in its "supremo" (\$6.75) variation.

Similarly oversized, the house salad (\$3) overflows with raw carrot chunks, cucumbers, onions



Grand Azteca's enchiladas verde.

and tomatoes. The "special house dressing" promised on the menu turns out to be a packet of Paul Newman's politically correct ranch. Other salads are built around tacos, fajitas and quesadillas.

Chef Juan Ramos offers 31 combination dinners (\$6.50 to \$7.50) that mix and match endless varieties of tacos, enchiladas, burritos and chalupas with *chile relleno*, beans, rice, sour cream and the more obscure tostaguac, a crispy corn tortilla with beans, beef, lettuce, tomatoes and guacamole. I was able to identify that item thanks to the glossary on the back of the long menu.

Among the more elaborate "Especialidades del Cocinero" or chef's suggestions is the shrimp fajita, the most expensive dish in the house at \$13.25, a large portion of sizzling shrimp, peppers, tomatoes and nicely charred onions, served with piping hot flour tortillas, refried beans laced with cheese, and guacamole. Alas, though well-prepared, these especially tiny crustaceans live up to their name.

On the other hand, the *pollo Azteca* (\$8.25), grilled and marinated chicken covered with a zingy barbecue sauce, was more than ample. The cheese-topped beans that come with are unusual in that they all but disappear into a dense liquid form.

Other chef suggestions include yolanda or chick-

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Mel Small
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EAT THE PAGE

BROTHERS MATT and Ted Lee just scored the James Beard Awards for Cookbook of the Year and Food of the Americas, as well as the IACP Julia Child Award for the Best First Book in the American Category, not bad for a couple of Northerners who're part-time transplants to Charleston. *The Lee Bros. Southern Cookbook: Stories and Recipes for Southerners and Would-be Southerners* (W.W. Norton, \$35), with its regional lore and tantalizing photos, will lure you to



A TASTY BEVERAGE

PINOT NOIR has enjoyed a new-found audience since two bachelors took an excursion through California's wine country in the zany film *Sideways*. Isidor's Choice Winery Pinot Noir is a super-low-production, Burgundian style endeavor produced from Stanton Vineyards, a small specialty grower in Leelanau County, by Lee Lutes of Black Star Farms, another notable Michigan winemaker. The 2003 is very ripe,



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