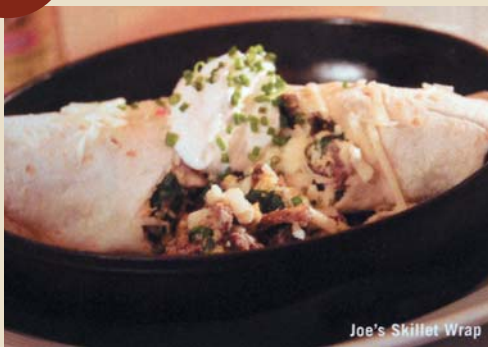


SEPTEMBER 1, 2005

R & I SPECIAL REPORT

2005 MENU CENSUS

## Breakfast



Joe's Skillet Wrap

### JOE'S SKILLET WRAP

FireLake Grill House & Cocktail Bar,  
Minneapolis

Yield: 4 servings

Hamburger patties, 4 oz.	4
Clarified butter	as needed
Onions, sliced	4 oz.
Mushrooms	4 oz.
Cajun spice mix	1 tsp.
Fresh spinach	1/2 lb.
Cream cheese	1 oz.
Liquid pasteurized eggs	16 oz.
Flour tortillas, warmed	4
White Cheddar cheese, shredded	1 cup
Sour cream	as needed
Fresh chives, snipped	2 tsp.

**1. Place burgers on buttered griddle; top with onions, mushrooms and spice mix. Chop mixture as it cooks until meat is brown throughout. Add spinach, cream cheese and eggs; scramble together.**

**2. Divide mixture among warm tortillas, top with cheese and roll up. Top with sour cream and chives.**

MAY 1, 2005

# biggreen

Main-course salads are the entrée of choice for carb-and fat-conscious diners.

By Lisa Bertagnoli, Special to R&I

When **FireLake Grill House and Cocktail Bar** opened in Minneapolis two years ago, the menu listed three entrée salads. Today, they are seven, ranging from Caesar (\$6.95), with house-made ciabatta-bread croutons and shaved Asiago, to the Minnesota Salad (\$7.95), featuring locally made goat cheese, balsamic-marinated onions and charred corn.

Chef Paul Lynch upped the salad ante when he noticed that guests looked for more salad/protein combinations and fewer starches. "When low-carb diets hit big, we saw the pickup in salads," he says.

The low-carbohydrate craze might be winding down among grocery shoppers, but chefs agree that the eating style still has a hold on restaurant customers, who are increasingly comfortable choosing main-course salads over traditional entrées.

Tim Williams, executive chef and partner at Dantanna's in Atlanta, says that main-course salads account for nearly a third of entrée orders, a figure that's risen steadily in the 18 months since the restaurant opened. Salad choices at the 230-seat casual-upscale restaurant includes Caesar (\$9); spinach salad with chile-glazed shrimp, blue cheese, almonds and mandarin oranges (\$16); and two chicken salads—one Asian flavored and one fried chicken (\$11 each).

Williams attributes Dantanna's salad success to health-minded customers and to improving economy. "People are eating out more times a week and they don't want steak every night," he says. "They get a steak one night, a salad the next."

### Lunchtime Favorite

Entrée salads rule at midday when demand is high for lighter fare. At **FireLake**, main course salads account for 20% to 25% of lunch entrées, a figure that falls to 12% at dinner, Lynch says.

Customers who order salads usually make up difference with a glass of wine or dessert. "Folks having salad as an entrée are two-course diners," Lynch says.

At both **Mustards Grill** and **Cindy's Backstreet Kitchen** in St. Helena, Calif., lunch guests don't share entrée salads, as do dinner patrons, says Chef-owner Cindy Pawlcyn. At the evening meal, salads often are split as an appetizer, she explains.

Pawlcyn adds that her customers tend to become attached to entrée salads, selecting the same choice on a regular basis. Asian-marinated lamb salad with greens and tomatoes (\$14.95) had been part of the main menu for three years; when it rotated off, so many customers complained that it was put back on. The same thing happened with Cobb salad. "A lot of people get addicted to them," Pawlcyn says.

Customer complaints aside, she tries to change salad menu twice a year, or at least the salads' accompaniments.

Popularity of low-carb diets along with increasing guest demand for freshness mean the marriage of salad greens and proteins such as beef, chicken or lamb is bound to be a happy one.

### Easy Does It

Maindish salads might look easy-greens mixed with protein and a few vegetables—but chefs say there's an art to creating entrée salads with staying power.

An array of textures is a key to success, says Pawlcyn. "They keep the mouth going." Impeccably fresh greens also are a must, as is a light hand with dressings. A variety of ingredients is good, but too many operators "dumb down" a salad, she says.

Williams of Dantanna's swears by texture plus an array of flavor profiles—sweet, tart, rich, savory. "Combined with the freshness of greens, the salad is more satisfying," he says.

Even though they require a measure of planning and creativity, entrée salads are easier to execute than grilled or sautéed items. This quality makes them menu stars in chefs' eyes. "They're easy to plate, easy to make ahead of time, they don't have to be kept hot and they're visually appealing," says Elizabeth Stone, chef-owner of **The Stone Kitchen**, a catering firm in Houston.

Cost also contributes to their popularity with chefs. Food costs for main-dish salads at **FireLake** average 25% while traditional entrées can soar to 38%, Lynch says. Salads maintain a modest food cost even when diners choose to supplement them with several ounces of shrimp, chicken, or salmon. "I just accept 33% on that," Lynch says.

As operationally friendly as main-dish salads are, Lynch has an even better reason for keeping them on the menu. "They sell," he says.