

# Many fine dining eateries booked New Year's Eve

By Sandra Omand  
SPECIAL TO THE BEAVER

Avoiding the mistakes made by some upscale restaurants in Toronto, Oakville's fine dining establishments are offering a special New Year's evening at Twentieth Century prices.

Trying to cash in on the hype of the new millennium's arrival, many in the service industry (restaurants, hotels, tour operators) offered elaborate and extravagantly expensive ways to bring in the New Year only to find they did not sell.

Instead they found consumers,

resisting the marketing hysteria surrounding the millennium, were not willing to pay exorbitant rates just because it was New Year's 2000 and opted instead for low key affairs emphasizing family and friends.

"There are too many gougers out there," said David Abraham, who along with his wife Molly, owns Stoneboats and priced their soldout early and late seatings at \$65 and \$75 respectively. "This New Year's was hyped up way too much."

Centro, a popular upscale restaurant in Toronto, was one of that breed, as was North 44 who found out the hard

way that people were not willing to pay \$495 or \$1,000 per person respectively. Lack of reservations left Centro no option but to close New Year's Eve while North 44 has reduced its price to \$225.

"We didn't go crazy on our pricing because all our regular clientele are coming and it is no excuse for us to go higher than we would normally on a New Year's Eve," said George Couto, owner of Seasons. "If we ripped them off for the millennium, we wouldn't see them throughout the year."

Seasons was sold out over a month ago for both its early seating at 4:30 p.m. for \$75 and its second seating at 8 p.m. for \$150.

At Season's the \$150 buys a nine-course meal with each dish representing an era.

Reflecting the '20s will be Oysters Rockefeller, the '30s Caesar's salad, the '60s Dean Martin shrimp cocktail and so on followed by dancing and a glass of champagne at midnight.

Julia Hanna, owner of Paradiso, also felt people would not pay five times more than the usual rate for this New Year's, and decided to offer two seatings (both full), one at 5:30 p.m. for families with young children at the regular a la carte menu prices and another at 7:30 p.m. for \$100 per person.

The later seating includes a set five-course "gourmet Mediterranean feast" that will be finished by 10:30 p.m. to allow patrons the opportunity to join in the local celebration at Towne Square or be home with their families to ring in the New Year.

"I really believe this is a millennium that people want to stay with family and friends and I didn't want my staff working past midnight," said Hanna. "I wanted them to spend time with their families."

"Everybody that is coming are all people we know, they are regulars so it

is going to be nice for us too," she said.

One restaurant surprised they are not fully booked is Jonathan's. General manager, Jason Alikakos, believes, however, that rumours going around town about outrageous pricing for their New Year's celebrations are partly to blame.

"A lot of our regular customers are staying home this year to be with their families and I'm sure the rumours we're charging \$1,000 to \$1,500 didn't help either," said Alikakos. "I don't know where that all got started."

Jonathan's, however, is still the most costly of all the Oakville restaurants surveyed, at \$305 plus taxes and gratuities, but it is also the only restaurant offering an open bar.

Calling it their Platinum Ball, Alikakos said Jonathan's is going all out to provide an evening to remember with only one seating starting with a reception at 7 p.m.

Following that will be an eight-course dinner offering such delicacies as Russian caviar, lobster, Black Angus beef tenderloin, quail, and will be topped off by a surprise grand finale dessert followed by dancing to the Rob Reed Trio until 3 a.m.

Throughout the evening champagne will be flowing (Piper Hiedsieck - Marilyn Monroe's favourite) while the wine accompanying dinner will be Louis Jadot's Pouilly-Fuisse and Cotes du Beaune.

Oliver's, meanwhile, decided not to include champagne for the \$150 a person, 9 p.m. seating, to give patrons the choice of what they wanted to drink while bringing in the new millennium.

Nancy Knowles, owner of Oliver's Steak House, said the late seating has been booked for two months (their 5 p.m. a la carte seating is now also fully booked) and the restaurant is taking great pains to make everything extra special. A violinist and cellist will play

during the second seating, a bagpiper will pipe in the New Year and there will be dancing after midnight to taped music.

"We always get booked solid for New Year's but this year we got booked a little early," said Knowles.

Also different this year, Knowles said, is that they have noticed suppliers putting up the prices for ingredients slightly which is why Oliver's is charging more than in previous years.

Knowles said diners at the late seating will be able to choose from entrees such as beef tenderloin with black truffles, pheasant, rack of lamb, fresh caribou or catch of the day with lobster.

La Costa is also offering entertainment, a five course meal as well as champagne at midnight, for \$125. They too are fully booked.

Alan Mickeziczius, owner of Trattoria Timone - also completely booked for New Year's - said they are not doing anything very different from last year. There is an early a la carte seating then another at 9 p.m. that is a fixed price dinner at \$100 within which there are a variety of choices followed by a glass of champagne at midnight.

Mickeziczius, however, is not looking forward to New Year's Eve and said he "hates special days."

"I like it when we are operating on a daily basis," said Mickeziczius. "The hype associated with Valentine's Day, Mother's Day and New Year's makes it very, very hard to please everybody so I prefer the normal days."

"In future years I might close on these days and go out myself," he added.

Meanwhile, for those looking for a place to go New Year's Eve, Bistro 300, Jonathan's and Roma Bella still have some space available.

Another option is to put your name on a waiting list in hopes last minute cancellations will open up some space.



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