

The Carmel Pine Cone

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Friday, February 2, 2024

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■ Whole Enchilada closes

The Whole Enchilada — almost as much a Moss Landing fixture as the power plant — has gone dark after nearly 45 years in business. Owners Ray and Jan Retez opened the popular Mexican restaurant in 1979, but following Ray's death in November, the family has decided to close the doors. They sent out an email that said, in part, "We extend our deepest and most sincere gratitude for all those remarkable years. It has been a joy and an honor to serve the vibrant Monterey Bay community, growing alongside it, learning from it, and being an integral part of its rich tapestry." They added they were "immensely proud and grateful."

The family also owns the nearby Haute Enchilada, which will remain open.

Chef Ben Hillan's menu attempts to capture *amor* on a plate, beginning with a choice of Dungeness crab with truffle custard and caviar, or wild mushroom paté, and a second course of either a seared scallop with blood orange sauce or compressed watermelon with burrata (creamy mozzarella), mint, citrus and pistachio. For an entrée, you can try the blackened sea bass with pickled asparagus, charred leek and turmeric cauliflower, osso buco with risotto, or "Spanish ratatouille." Finish the meal with a relatively light dessert of either blood orange crema catalana (at the risk of causing an international incident, that's similar to crème brûlée) or passion fruit sorbet.

The meal is \$90 per person plus tax and gratuity, and items from the regular menu will also be available. Dinner is served from 4:30 to 8:30 p.m. on Feb. 14. Call (831) 375-0176 for more information and to reserve a table.

■ Shellfish love

Since Valentine's Day coincides with Crab Mania 2024 on Old Fisherman's Wharf — celebrating the long-awaited opening of Dungeness crab season — restaurants are brimming with menu items celebrating hearts, claws, or both.

You can start the day off right at Crab Louie's Bistro, which will be serving lobster or fresh crab Benedict with mimosas for breakfast. Old Fisherman's Grotto offers several Valentine's specials including oyster appetizers, surf-and-turf options, sea bass with crab, and classic lobster Thermidor. Keep it old-school with baked Alaska for dessert, if you like. The Grotto will also serve a "Cuddle Fish"

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cocktail with toasted coconut, rum, pineapple, orange and guava, served flaming.

Café Fina has Dungeness crab served five ways, while Domenico's has crab cioppino style. Abalonetti and Rockfish Harbor Grill are offering their Dungeness takes, too, along with their regular locals specials. Trattoria Paluca's got a 5-ounce filet mignon and 5-ounce lobster tail combo.

If your partner's game, you could take a whale-watching cruise, or simply stroll along the old wharf, hand in hand.

■ More than sandwiches

There's more pastrami and corned beef on the way, this time from Temple Beth El in Salinas. On Feb. 8 and 9, the annual Kosher-Style Deli Pack Drive Thru offers the deli-deprived enough food for four people — 1 lb. of either pastrami or corned beef, a loaf of rye bread, salad, four dill pickles and half of a chocolate cake — all for \$39. Pre-ordering is required and you can pick up in Monterey both days at First Presbyterian Church, 501 El Dorado St. Additional meat, pickles and cake are available for an extra fee. Order soon, as



the event does sell out. Visit templebethelsalinas or call (831) 242-9151 for more information and to reserve your deli pack.

■ Sweets for, well, you know

Café Carmel on Ocean between Mission and San Carlos is getting ready to celebrate Valentine's Day with some goodies



from the oven. The café's "baked expressions of love" will include heart-themed cookies, as well as tiramisu. If you procrastinate, you can always pick up some pastries for a last-minute breakfast-in-bed surprise. Café Carmel is open daily from 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., and you can visit cafecarmel.com or call (831) 624-3870 for more information or to order.

Thanks to a late-opening Dungeness crab season, Fisherman's Wharf has a selection of Valentine's specials — like lobster from Old Fisherman's Grotto — as well as plenty of dishes with the season's other white meat, fresh crab.

Just up the road, Paris Bakery at 271 Bonifacio Place in Monterey has heart-shaped desserts, including a variety of cakes (large and small), chocolate dipped strawberries, cupcakes, cake pops and decorated cookies. Drop by or call (831) 646-1620 to learn more.

Elaine Hesser wrote this week's column.