

Restaurateurs Think Outside the Heart Shaped Box this Valentine's Day

Maryland's Favorite Restaurants Ready to Help Celebrate

(Columbia, MD) The unsure economy won't stop Cupids across Maryland's counties from treating their loved ones to a delicious dining out experience this February 14. The National Restaurant Association (NRA) reports that more than 35 percent of Americans wine and dine on Valentine's Day, the second most popular day of the year to eat out closely following Mother's Day.

"Valentine's Day reservations are right on target despite the tough economy" commented Kelly Regan of Monocacy Crossing. "Saturday is already the biggest night of the week for dining out, even without a holiday. However, Valentine's Day falling on a weekend has worked in our favor. Diners have three days to choose from to celebrate. We are seeing lunch and dinner reservations across the board-Friday, Saturday and Sunday!" added Regan.

"Diners still want to celebrate this special day, but they may choose to with a budget in mind" said Paul Hartgen, President & CEO of the Restaurant Association of Maryland. According to the NRA, of those who dine out on Valentine's Day, 80 percent spend less than \$100 on their meal, with an average of \$62. One in four (20 percent) spend more than \$100. "Restaurants are innately aware of consumers' concerns over the economy and their personal finances and are providing appropriate dining options. That is why we are seeing dining alternatives including fixed price-dinner-for-two, late lunch specials, carryout options for those celebrating at home and dessert-for-two promotions in addition to the traditional dinner offerings" commented Hartgen.

For diners feeling love in the air with price on the mind, many restaurant owners are giving extra thought to menu pricing. Some have made their menus more affordable due to the state of the economy realizing the average consumer may not be able to spend the same amount as years past. "Reservation counts are right where they need to be and we are very excited to offer our Valentine's Day specials. Our customers can rest assured that lower costs will not mean a sacrifice in quality of their favorite meals" commented Karen Murray, owner of TJ's of Calverton. The local Beltsville restaurant is offering a Valentine's Surf & Turf special featuring steak and shrimp, mashed potato, garden salad and a loaf of bread for \$14.95.

Foodservice operations welcome Valentine's Day in February, which is typically a slower time of year for the industry outside of holiday reservations. "Our restaurateurs will continue to think outside the box to keep dining traditions alive, the bottom line in check and diners satisfied when they dine out on those special nights" closed Hartgen.

Please visit your favorite local restaurant or try something new this Valentine's Day. The Restaurant Association of Maryland Nominees for Favorite Restaurant and Maryland Favorite New Restaurant will be honored by their peers at the "Stars of the Industry" Annual Awards Gala on March 23, 2009. Be sure to vote for your favorite today at www.marylandrestaurants.com/stars.

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Maryland Favorite New Restaurant

Catonsville Gourmet Market
& Fine FoodsCatonsville
Mitchum's SteakhouseTrappe
Old Hickory SteakhouseNational Harbor
VOLTFrederick
Woodberry Kitchen.....Baltimore

Favorite Restaurant

Antrim 1844Taneytown
Black's Bar & KitchenBethesda
Marlin Moon GrilleOcean City
CharlestonBaltimore
Jordan's SteakhouseEllicott City

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The Restaurant Association of Maryland (RAM) has remained relevant to restaurateurs for over 80 years by maintaining core principles born out of the first national financial crisis. In 1927 a small group of Baltimore area restaurateurs met to deal with some of the challenges facing the economy and the Foodservice Industry. Today, RAM is a 2,000 member strong statewide trade association operated for the purpose of promoting, protecting and improving the foodservice industry in the State of Maryland. Since the very beginning, the Association has been run by restaurateurs and suppliers working not only for the benefit of dues paying members, but also for the restaurant industry as a whole. For more information about the restaurant industry in Maryland please visit our website at www.marylandrestaurants.com.