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King of Prussia dining spots rally once again for Restaurant Week

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UPPER MERION >>Whether you take the no-frills, down-to-earth approach and ask for the “fixed price” menu, or go all European and sophisticated with the maître-d’-impressing “prix fixe” (pronounced “pree feeks”), there’s no doubt that King of Prussia’s second annual dineKOP Restaurant Week is a time to find the best deals from choice restaurants all over town.

No matter what you call it, a prix fixe menu is simply a bunch of predetermined items offered as a multi-course meal at a price diners will hopefully find affordable.

In the case of the restaurants banding together under the dineKOP brand, the offers range from around \$20 for lunch options to up to \$40 for dinner.

A portion of the proceeds will benefit The Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia’s new Specialty Care & Surgery Center, and each restaurant will “adopt” a CHOP ambassador family to enjoy a meal during Restaurant Week.

If last year is any indication, reservations will again book completely for the event sponsored by King of Prussia District (KOP-BID) and running March 7 through 13.

Naturally, every participating restaurant owner on the ever-growing King of Prussia dining scene is hoping for a bump in business, not only from the regulars they depend on all year, but from those who don’t necessarily have said restaurant on their hunger radar.

The \$20 lunch deal at Creed’s Seafood & Steaks, 499 N. Gulph Road, King of Prussia, includes starters like the traditional Caesar salad or wild mushroom soup, and entrees of Scottish salmon burger or chopped Cobb salad.

For that all-important sweet ending, diners can choose between warm chocolate-roasted chestnut bread pudding or Bassett's ice cream or sorbet.

The \$40 dinner package comes with a choice of the traditional Caesar salad, lobster bisque or an artisan cheese board, with entrée offerings ranging from pan-seared stuffed prime reserve pork chop to Scottish salmon and twin filet mignon skewers.

Desserts tempting the decision-making process include Cabernet dark chocolate mousse, Creed's cheesecake and spiced port wine crème brulee.

As Creed's diners who eschewed the fast-casual front for a midday repast refined by white linens and attentive table service enjoyed their meals in an intimate nearby dining room, owner Jim Creed recalled the relatively uncultivated landscape of the King of Prussia dining scene back in 1982, the year he launched Creed's predecessor, the Austrian-flavored Baron's Inne.

"There was a market for a new restaurant in King of Prussia because there weren't too many back in those days," noted Creed, who had partnered with Austria native Victor Schmidt and ex-insurance guy Blaine Scott. "Now we're King of Prussia's only remaining freestanding independent eatery."

When Schmidt passed away 15 years later, Creed bought out Scott and renamed the restaurant Creed's Seafood & Steaks.

"I changed things around and built an extensive wine list," said Creed, who also owns the General Warren Inne in Malvern, which opened the year after Baron's Inne. "We have a terrific wine list and have won all kinds of awards."

Creed left the design of the dineKOP menu to chef John Talbot, who's been with him since the transition of Baron's Inne to Creed's.

"The purpose of Restaurant Week, in my opinion, is to introduce the restaurant to more outsiders, to come in and try our restaurants and create some synergism between all the restaurants. Because we're all one big happy family, really. If people can't get in Morton's or Ruth's Chris, they'll come here, and vice versa," Creed said, as the soft chatter from the bar drifted over.

“Everybody calls our bar Cheers because it’s a place where everybody knows your name,” he said, smiling. “It’s an upscale crowd, but not stuffy.”

The newest kid in town on the dineKOP block, LP Steak, moved into the spot formerly occupied by Pacific Prime at Valley Forge Casino Resort, 1160 First Ave., King of Prussia, under the auspices of well-pedigreed chef-restaurateur Luke Palladino.

With the opening of LP Steak, Culinary Institute of America-trained Palladino has built an impressive cluster of restaurants under the Luke Palladino Hospitality Group umbrella, including Palladino’s on Passyunk in Philadelphia and Luke Palladino Seasonal Italian Cooking in Linwood, N.J., as well as Luke Palladino Catering.

“A lot of the items during Restaurant Week are on the regular menu, just formatted to fit the \$40 price range,” noted Palladino by phone earlier in the week. “It’s really a tremendous value, designed to draw people in, which is what it’s all about.”

Diners are invited to upgrade many selections from the prix fixe menu, which includes appetizers such as pierogies, crab cakes, roasted cauliflower and four onion soup gratin; main courses of Bell & Evans organic chicken, scallops, fish of the day and 10 oz. grilled hanger steak.

New York cheesecake leads the toothsome part of the meal, further sweetened with chocolate cashew praline cake and passion fruit crème brulee.

Palladino said that dineKOP was “a good way to broaden our customer base and get people to come in and see what we’re doing, and at the same time we’re contributing to CHOP, which is important to us. Steakhouses are never cheap,” he added, “because the commodity of beef is expensive. When you go to a steakhouse it’s not the same as going to get pasta. But at the casino it’s always the most popular style. And you don’t need to spend a fortune to come here. Within our menu is a lot of range and a lot of value.”

Other dineKOP-participating restaurants include Pepper’s Italian Restaurant; Morton’s The Steakhouse; Ralph’s of South Philly; Ruth’s Chris Steak House; Seasons 52; Sullivan’s Steakhouse; The Capital Grille; The Melting Pot; The Pub by Wegmans; The Zodiac at Neiman Marcus; Maggiano’s

Little Italy; The Valley Tavern; Cantina Laredo, Bonefish Grill and Bahama Breeze.