

[BN] Food & Drink: Mike Andrzejewski hits TV and takes charge in Florida

Andrew Galarnau

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Mike Andrzejewski appears at 8 p.m. Dec. 5 on Food Network's "Chopped: Julia Child's Kitchen," competing against three other chefs.
Food Network

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Mike A hits the small screen, Gold Coast

Mike Andrzejewski isn't done cooking.

The Polish-American restaurateur who helped lead a generation of Buffalo restaurant resurgence before closing **SeaBar** and moving to Alabama was only resting, it turns out.

Andrzejewski's story started in Lancaster. His next chapter launches on Florida's Gold Coast, with Roka Hula, a restaurant from the True Grit Hospitality group coming to Orlando in early spring, then Delray Beach. He'll be in a chef de cuisine role, responsible for developing dishes and sourcing ingredients, not cooking them on the line every night.

Andrzejewski has worked for almost two decades since losing his left leg in a motorcycle accident. At 64, he finally has a job he can do sitting down. "Right now I'm in a fully equipped, industrial commercial kitchen, and I get to spend eight to 10 hours a day just creating foods that I feel like making that day," he said.

The dream-come-true part rolls onto the small screen with Andrzejewski's next Food Network appearance, 8 p.m. Dec. 5. **Andrzejewski appears** on Food Network's "Chopped: Julia Child's Kitchen," competing against three other chefs for a spot in the championship bout. The last time he appeared on the network, Andrzejewski's loco moco, Hawaiian-style fried rice topped with hamburgers and gravy, **Beat Bobby Flay**.

Back in the real world, Andrzejewski's day job is dish creation and ingredient sourcing. Given a broad brief to show his stuff, Andrzejewski's wheelhouse will be "very upscale pan-Asian." Details and dishes to fill out that order is Andrzejewski's problem.

It is also his joy.

"It's really exciting to have to only worry about food, and not have to worry about the whole picture," he said. "My efforts can go into training people and finding great ingredients and researching new techniques. Just concentrating on the food, which is what I love about this business, without having to be bogged down by the details of plumbing or electrical or permits or finances."

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OPENINGS & CLOSINGS

Casino comfort: Hamburg Gaming, the racino at the Erie County Fairgrounds, has a new offering for customers: Indulge, a \$3 million reset of the facility's main restaurant.

By customer request, the restaurant at 5820 South Park Ave., Hamburg, at the Erie County Fairgrounds, specializes in fried, grilled and comfort foods. That means not just beef on weck, but a beef on weck burger. Buffalo wings, Buffalo chicken finger pizza and Buffalo roasted cauliflower.

Beer-battered fish fry, turkey dinner, meatloaf poutine, mac and cheese and Nashville hot chicken are also comforting, depending on your heat cravings.

Customers order from screens and pick up their food from three serving counters before deciding where to sit. Check out the menu **here**. Hours: 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. Sunday through Thursday; 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. Friday and Saturday.

Bakers and brews: Deck the Halls, a cookie contest and celebration of Christmas brews, lands Dec. 3 at Pizza Plant Italian Pub, 7770 Transit Road, Amherst.

Christmas beers start at noon, Beer Geek Bottle Share at 3 p.m.

To compete, register by Dec. 2 at tinyurl.com/5wev2624. Bake two dozen cookies, and bring them in for judging. Top baker gets \$100, \$50 and \$25 for second and third place. Then the cookies will be sold, the proceeds going to **Sleep in Heavenly Peace**, a group that makes beds for children.

MORE RESTAURANT INTEL

Downtown Bazaar persists: Restaurateurs at Downtown Bazaar, 617 Main St., report that the opening of the West Side Bazaar, 1432 Niagara St., has coincided with a major traffic drop-off at their Theatre District location. Readers have expressed confusion as well.

So a brief primer: There are two bazaars in Buffalo now.

Downtown, open 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. Tuesday to Saturday, is the city's only source of Ethiopian dining, thanks to Abyssinia Ethiopian, South Sudanese cuisine, at Nile River, and Filipino, at Pinoy Boi. Plus tacos, burritos and more at Oralia Mexican, and Burmese tea leaf salad, curry, and more with lotus flower cookies and bubble tea at Pattaya Street Food.

Downtown Bazaar has a full-service bar in **Lulu's Pub**, for your pre-event preparations.

West Side Bazaar offers Korean, Egyptian, Vietnamese, Italian, Congolese African, Burmese, Malaysian and Japanese restaurants, and is open 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday.

ASK THE CRITIC

Q: The arepas at Sabores de mi Tierra, the Colombian restaurant on Niagara Street, are delicious, but they made me wonder if there are any pupusas in town? Those Salvadoran treats have been on my crave list since I lived in Queens.

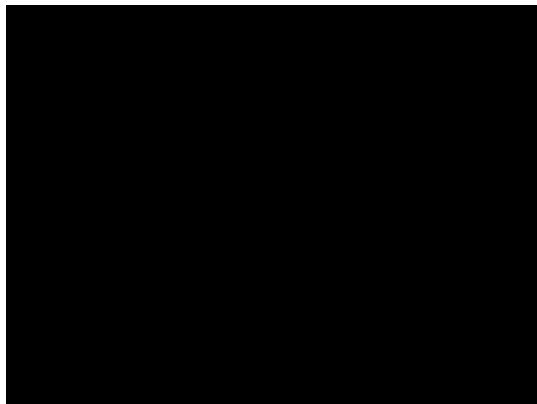
– *Phil H., via Facebook*

A: You're in luck. A Salvadoran takeout operation has been serving up pupusas and other Salvadoran dishes in Lackawanna. At **House of Pupusas** the cheese-stuffed Salvadoran corncakes can also contain beans, pork, shrimp and more. Phone: 716-316-2811.



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