

AKAI HANA

3223 W. Lake Ave., Wilmette, 847/251-0384, [Japanese]. If it's sushi you have a hankering for, Akai Hana is the place to go. Fish, however, is not the only option. Tempura and chicken teriyaki also help create a Japanese experience worth revisiting. Lunch, dinner daily. \$5

ALLGAUER'S ON THE RIVERFRONT

Hilton Northbrook, 2855 N. Milwaukee Ave., Northbrook, 847/664-7999; www.northbrookallgauers.com, [American/French/Continental/Steaks]. There are pastoral sights outside and a feeling of elegance to the interior, but chef Warren DeWolfe's menu of upscale American fare — peppered with a classic European sensibility — is a knockout all on its own. Pick from items like grilled Chilean sea bass with sweet potatoes and curry sauce or seared sea scallops with fennel and risotto, but don't leave without tasting the chocolate banana mousse bombé. Come by for seafood and prime rib night on Fridays or the champagne brunch on Sundays. Breakfast, dinner daily; lunch Mon-Sat; brunch Sun. ☎ \$\$\$

BIG BOWL

215 Parkway Drive, Lincolnshire, 847/808-8880; 1950 E. Higgins Road, Schaumburg, 847/517-8881; 6 E. Cedar St., Chicago, 312/640-8888; 60 E. Ohio St., Chicago, 312/951-1888, [Asian]. Casual Asian cooking specializing in noodles, stir-fry, soups and wraps. Creations include Thai-herb calamari, green vegetable won tons and shrimp with snow peas and mushrooms. If you're adventurous, create your own meal at the stir-fry bar. ☎ ☎ \$\$\$

BISTRO 22

500 Ela Road, Lake Zurich, 847/438-0200; www.bistro-22.com, [French/American]. Classic cuisine thrives at this spot, whose menu includes options like rack of lamb, Dover sole, seared foie gras and salade Lyonnaise. R: Grilled, herb-marinated skirt steak. Try the crème brûlée trio for dessert. Dinner daily. ☎ \$\$\$

BLACK RAM STEAKHOUSE

1414 E. Oakton St., Des Plaines, 847/824-1227, [Steaks/Seafood]. After more than 35 years, this clubby steakhouse is still as good as it gets with its prime steaks, fresh seafood and extensive wine list. Try the raspberry torte with crème anglaise for dessert. Lunch Mon-Fri, dinner daily. ☎ \$\$\$

BLU SUSHI RESTAURANT AND LOUNGE

1700 Orrington Ave., Evanston, 847/491-9220; www.sushi-blu.com, [Japanese]. Creative sparks from the sushi bar — Maui Tartare, the Salmon Obsession roll, the Blu Maki roll — complement originals from the kitchen, like a miso-glazed grilled portobello mushroom or a small-plate skewer of filet mignon, potato, avocado and asparagus. Banana spring roll for dessert. Lunch Mon-Sat, dinner daily. Lounge open Mon-Sat starting at 9 p.m. Carry-out available. ☎ ☎ \$\$\$\$

BLUEGRASS

1636 Old Deerfield Road, Highland Park, 847/831-0595; www.bluegrasshp.com, [American]. American cuisine gets a global makeover at this down-to-earth neighborhood destination. Try the mushroom broil, tuna tartare, walleye filet and grouper sassafras. "The calamari gets a real showcase — a huge martini glass, maybe a foot in diameter. This is a bit large for drinking, but fill it with a bed of lettuce and a load of fried calamari with ground peanuts and wasabi-mayonnaise dipping sauce, and there's enough to feed a committee!" — [SK]. R: Rib eye. For dessert, don't pass on bananas Foster. Plenty of free parking and carry-out available. Lunch Tue-Fri, dinner Tue-Sun. ☎ ☎ \$\$\$

BOB CHINN'S CRAB HOUSE RESTAURANT

393 S. Milwaukee Ave., Wheeling, 847/520-3633; www.bobchinn.com, [Seafood]. It's not the highest-volume restaurant in the area for no reason; from suits to shorts, anyone can feel at home here. The coastal décor reflects the menu. Chinn's offers fresh fish, several kinds of crab, plus a raw bar with clams, oysters and shrimp. Steak and chicken are also available. For dessert, Key lime pie. During the week, reservations accepted for parties of four or less and preferred seating for larger parties always available, which cuts waiting time in half. Lunch, dinner daily. \$\$\$

BRAVO! CUCINA ITALIANA

2600 Navy Blvd., Glenview, 847/724-8400, [Italian]. The décor suggests the ruins of ancient Rome; the menu reflects the best of contemporary Italian cuisine. Consistently voted "Best Italian" in other major markets, dinner at this casual,



*Chew-chew Train

This June, when you make the initial ascent up the front porch of the old Wilmette Train Station and into the cozy confines of Rob and Ann Garrison's new Latin eatery, the **Depot Nuevo**, you should feel a gentle breeze of déjà vu blow by.

The owners, for one, should look familiar. Seventeen years ago, the Garrisons opened up The Noodle in Wilmette, a veritable North Shore pasta landmark. And you should also recognize the building: The old Wilmette Train Station was once home to the Quilmette Depot Restaurant. And then there's the staff. Recognize those faces? Chef Alvaro Chavez. General manager Jason Lerner. Assistant manager Trisha Baker. Wait-staff manager Valerie Lerner. All of the staff at The Noodle in Glenview — which will close so everyone can focus on the Depot — is expected to migrate to the Garrisons' new place.

But that's where those flashes of déjà vu are going to end because the Garrisons have totally renovated the train station, brightening things up with cool sherbet oranges, chili reds and margarita limes while maintaining the classical façade of the building. Depot Nuevo's menu is pan-Latin, with Chavez re-imagining many classic Latin dishes. The chipotle-rubbed trout, for example, is stuffed with a bacon-cabbage confit and served with mashed potatoes and chayote. Dollops of jalapeño sour cream accompany the house's Argentinean flank steak drizzled with chimichurri sauce. And the house's lime-marinated seviche Boliviano (shown above) includes a kitchen's worth of ingredients: bay scallops, tilapia, shrimp, corn, avocado and chopped sweet potatoes. It's the kind of summertime treat best enjoyed al fresco on the restaurant's 15 tables on the front porch.

"When we opened up The Noodle in Glenview, I think we made one mistake," says Rob Garrison. "I don't think we were as kid-friendly as we could have been."

So they're making up for lost time. The restaurant has taken great pains to create an inventive yet healthy kids' menu. The Garrisons have already conducted taste tests on their taco plates, cheese quesadillas and queso fundidos for the little ones. And in doing so the Garrisons spotted something familiar: the look of North Shore families gathered around a table, smiling, eating and laughing. Proof that their little Depot Nuevo is indeed on the right track. —Peter Gianopoulos

Depot Nuevo, 1139 Wilmette Ave., Wilmette, 847/251-3111, debuts with a celebration on June 12.