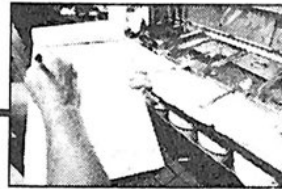


# THE BLADE

TOLEDO, OHIO, SUNDAY, DECEMBER 3, 1995

## WHO'S WATCHING



## THE KITCHEN?

### A LOOK AT THE SERIES



#### **A FAILED SYSTEM**

A Blade investigation shows that Toledo's restaurant inspection system is failing like few basic city services ever have. It is a system of missed inspections, sloppy follow-up, and slow reaction to complaints.



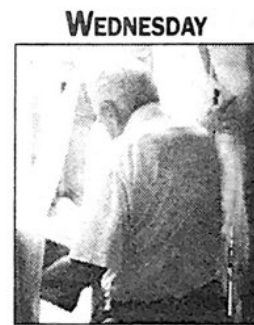
#### **RESERVATIONS REQUIRED**

When it comes to sanitary conditions, some of Toledo's most elegant and popular restaurants have had problems with inspections.



#### **HOW FAST FOOD FARES**

Though criticized by nutrition experts, fast-food outlets are among the cleanest places to eat. A Blade analysis shows which fast-food and pizza chains fare the best and which fare the worst.



#### **THE WARNING SIGNS**

Inspectors know which restaurants are troublesome because they are allowed in the kitchens. But how can customers tell if an eatery is safe? And how can you safe-guard your kitchens?



Toledo's inspection unit is not checking all restaurants annually as required by state law.

# WHO'S WATCHING THE KITCHEN?

*Day one of a four-part series*

**BY SAM ROE  
AND MICHAEL D. SALLAH**  
BLADE STAFF WRITERS

Toledo's restaurant inspection system — created to protect tens of thousands of diners each year — is failing like few basic city services ever have, a four-month investigation by The Blade has shown.

It is a system of missed inspections, sloppy follow-up, and slow reaction to complaints.

It is a system in which inspectors frequently threaten to crack down but rarely do.

And at a time when food-poisoning reports are rising and new bacteria emerging, it is a system that puts diners at risk every day by allowing some restaurants to repeatedly violate health standards.

In short, Toledo is not watching the kitchen.

The Blade reviewed more than 15,000 restaurant inspection reports, citizen complaints, and food-poisoning cases. The information then was

entered into a computer for analysis.

Among the findings:

► For years, Toledo has violated state law by not inspecting restaurants annually. Some restaurants have gone three years before an inspector showed up.

In one case, inspectors overlooked a West Toledo restaurant for 22 months, showing up only after someone alerted them to raw sewage in the basement.

► When inspectors do discover problems — roaches, filthy kitchens, uncovered food — nearly half the time they do not return to the restaurants to see that the violations have been fixed.

Inspectors gave one South Toledo restaurant 48 hours to clean up after an out-of-town diner complained it was filthy "inside and out." Four months later, the cleanup was still not complete.

► Some restaurants are allowed to repeat the same serious health violations year after year.

See **KITCHEN**, Page 14 ►

# Kitchen

► *Continued from Page 1*

A Reynolds Road restaurant has been cited for keeping food at temperatures conducive to bacteria growth seven times in the last nine years — a problem suspected in several food-poisoning complaints there.

► Even when problems persist, Toledo rarely shuts down restaurants — only two since 1990. That's far below the 100 closed by both Columbus and Dayton over the same period.

► Citizen complaints against restaurants have nearly doubled since 1992, but officials are taking longer to respond to those complaints — if they respond at all.

► Record-keeping in the inspection department is so antiquated that officials have little idea how many food-poisoning complaints they receive, which eateries have had the most violations, or which ones are due for an inspection.

"What this all says is that there are no cops on the beat," says Caroline Smith DeWaal of the Center for Science in the Public Interest, a nonprofit group in Washington that monitors food safety. "It's not enough to just leave it up to operators to make sure they're abiding by the code."

State officials have not been oblivious to some of these problems. For nearly two years, they have tried to get the city to shape up.

Three times officials have audited Toledo's inspection department.

Three times the city has flunked.

The problem: Restaurants — up to 40 per cent of them — were not inspected every 365 days.

State officials have repeatedly warned Toledo Health Director Dr. Joseph Fenwick and other local health officials: You're breaking the law, so get the department in order. But the problems have continued.

Now, state officials will give Toledo one more chance — its fourth.

If it fails the most recent audit, conducted Friday, the state could take over the city's inspection department.

"It's frustrating," says Paul Panico, Ohio's food protection director. "These are conditions that have been known over time."

Not in recent memory, he says, has an Ohio city experienced so many problems yet been so slow to react as Toledo.

Toledo health officials acknowledge they have not performed as expected. They blame staffing, saying the nine-member department has been hit hard by turnover and that at least two more workers are needed.

But now, they say, all restaurants are being inspected on time, and diners should not be frightened.

"Our restaurants are safe," says Dr. Fenwick.

In fact, city health supervisor Dale Hertzfeld says that preliminary results from Friday's audit show his department is now meeting state standards. The state says it must study the audit findings before releasing them this week.

Mr. Hertzfeld and Dr. Fenwick add that they are not quick to shut down troublesome restaurants because they would rather work with the operators to get them to comply with the rules.

For any city, clean, safe restaurants are no small deal: They are the heart of where people meet and socialize.

This is especially true in Toledo where last year only hotels captured a larger share of the \$498 million spent by local tourists.

"Restaurants are very, very critical to the city's economic development," says Jim Donnelly, head of the SeaGate Convention Centre.

As for the state of Toledo's kitchens, local inspectors issue a warning: Don't draw quick conclusions from inspection reports.

A long list of infractions does not necessarily mean a restaurant is bad, Mr. Hertzfeld says. Kitchen size, staff turnover, and customer volume can all skew the numbers.

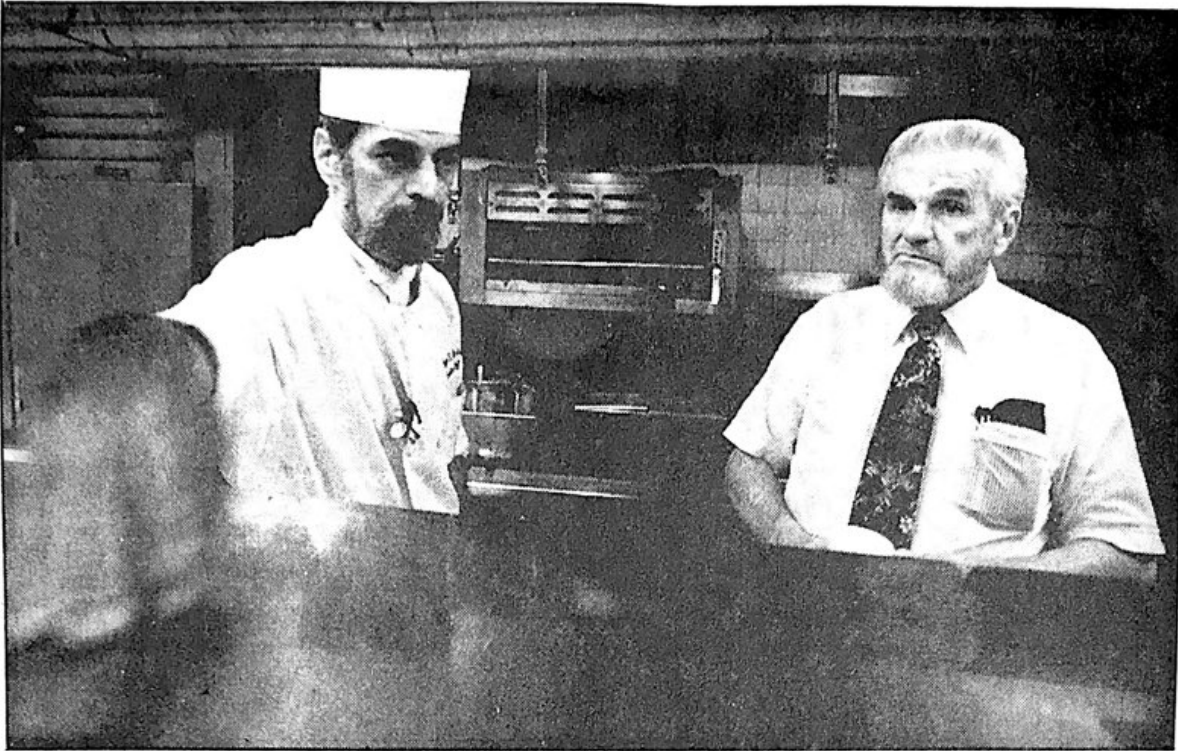
## Inspectors skip some restaurants

States decide how often to inspect their restaurants. In Florida, it's four times a year. In Indiana, it's three. In Michigan, two.

But Ohio requires only one inspection a year — and Toledo officials aren't even abiding by that.

Take the Spaghetti Warehouse, 42 S. Superior St., in downtown Toledo.

With its 19th-century memorabilia and a streetcar-turned-dining car, the restaurant is a favorite stop for families and office workers. But it hasn't been a regular stop for inspectors: They skipped the restau-



**City health inspector John Neeper, right, inspects the Radisson Hotel kitchen in downtown Toledo as executive chef Sedgie Davis looks on. The kitchen received good inspection marks.**

rant in 1992 and 1993, not showing up until last year.

By then, records show, problems were brewing.

In August, 1994, exterminators hired by the restaurant found "cockroach activity" in random areas. Inspectors checked on the problem but saw no bugs.

This past July, a woman reported finding a "live larva" in her ravioli. Chef Craig McKnight told inspectors the insect was a tiny beetle; inspectors said the bug may have come from the salad.

The Spaghetti Warehouse has had problems outside, too. Last year, inspectors found that one of the restaurant's pipes was draining raw sewage onto the adjacent Allright Parking lot.

"In the wintertime it would freeze, making it worse," recalls Kevin Donnelly, president of Allright Toledo Inc.

Plus, health officials say, the sewage could lead to disease in the restaurant if tracked in by customers or workers.

The restaurant's most recent inspection was this past August. Officials cited the restaurant for more than 20 infractions — five times the local restaurant average.

Among the violations: "insect debris" in a storage area for take-out containers.

Spaghetti Warehouse, part of a national chain, says all of its problems have been fixed. And company

officials say just because Toledo skips inspections, doesn't mean they do: Four times a year, they check their own restaurants.

"We feel we run a good, clean operation," says Dave Kuhnle, the restaurant's regional director.

Sometimes, city inspectors bypass restaurants with a history of problems.

In the mid-1980s, the Original Pancake House, a popular breakfast spot at 3310 W. Central Ave., had a "serious roach infestation," records show.

Then, each year from 1988 to 1993, inspectors found food, such as cottage cheese and scrambled eggs, sitting out at room temperatures — one of the most serious infractions found in any kitchen.

Despite the track record, inspectors didn't show up last year for an annual inspection.

Inspector Konni Sutfield says inspectors wanted to stay on top of the pancake house, but being spread so thin "it was more like a shot-gun approach: 'Fix what you can and move on.'"

For 22 months the restaurant went unchecked, inspectors not showing up until this spring when a caller alerted them to raw sewage in the basement.

The pancake house was ordered to clean up, fix a leaking sewage pipe, and remove sugar bags and other food from underneath the pipe.

Two months later, an inspector found the sewage was still there. The problem was then corrected.

In response, owner Burt Rose says violations are always corrected, the roaches have been gone for years, and temperature problems are "normal stuff" that can happen at busy restaurants.

As for the sewage in the basement this spring, he initially thought the problem was fixed, only to discover he needed a plumber.

He also notes that the Original has not had a food-poisoning complaint in years, and that inspectors find problems wherever they go.

"Inspectors don't waltz through a place, and, with 400 things that can go wrong, say everything is perfect.

"Overall," says Mr. Rose, "our record has been excellent."

The most recent inspection was in October. Inspectors found more than two dozen infractions, ranging from uncovered food to dirty floors, walls, and shelves.

## When officials fail to reinspect

Inspectors don't always do follow-up checks. They admit that.

But they say that when state-defined "critical" violations are found — like raw meat sitting out at room temperature — they always go back.

The Blade analysis of health department records shows otherwise.

Since 1990, inspectors have skipped reinspections on more than

275 critical violations.

"If restaurant owners don't correct critical violations, then you take them to court, you file administrative charges, you do what ever you have to do," says Arthur Banks, food safety director for the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. "You can't just walk away."

Records also show that when Toledo inspectors do go back, they sometimes grant so many extensions that problems linger for years.

One example: Carly Cheena's, a pizza and sub shop at 1430 N. Reynolds Rd.

Mice, fruit flies, and ants were headaches in 1990, along with dirty equipment in the kitchen and soiled laundry on the floor.

Some of the problems were fixed, but the ants and dirt remained.

Fed up, inspector Dale Hartman in 1992 warned that if sanitation didn't markedly improve, officials might shut the place down.

But the dirt continued, and in June, 1994, an out-of-town diner complained that the restaurant was filthy "inside and outside."

Inspectors checked it out, finding the eatery was in the midst of major remodeling. But they gave Carly Cheena's 48 hours to clean "the entire building."

When the deadline came, the cleanup was only partially finished.

Four months after that, it still was not complete.

The most recent annual inspection was last December. The list of violations was a familiar refrain:

Clean and sanitize all kitchen equipment. Clean the microwave oven and all refrigerators. Clean the restroom floors and walls.

There was no follow-up inspection.

Today, operator Thom Weber acknowledges that Carly Cheena's was not as clean as it should have been during the remodeling.

Now, he says, the remodeling is complete, and the restaurant has a new menu and name: Sunset Grill.

In response to other sanitation problems, he says: "My experience has been that [inspectors] will never let you off scot-free."

## Same problems, year after year

Since 1990, two-thirds of all Toledo restaurants have been cited for the same violation two years in a row, The Blade analysis shows.

This includes one of the most dangerous problems: serving food at unsafe temperatures — the No. 1 way customers get sick, experts say.

The rules are simple: Cold foods, such as cottage cheese, must be held at 45 degrees or below.

Hot foods, such as roast beef, must be kept at 140 degrees or above.

If this isn't done, bacteria can

## ABOUT THE INSPECTORS...

The Toledo Health Department's food service inspection unit is composed of eight inspectors and one acting supervisor. They are responsible for inspecting the city's 625 restaurants and another 835 "food service operations," or any place that serves or makes food — from eateries to bakeries to school cafeterias.

They also inspect Toledo's 837 grocery stores, carry outs, and other places where pre-packaged foods are sold. Vending machines at more than 400 locations are checked as well.

In addition, inspectors review restaurant blueprints and approve major equipment changes.

All of Toledo's inspectors are registered sanitarians, meaning they passed a state exam and trained for two years in a local health department. Under state rules, new inspectors must have at least a bachelor of sci-

ence degree.

The state health department oversees Toledo's inspection unit and others in Ohio. The state routinely audits local units to ensure they are following state regulations. If not, the state has the power to take over the units.

For nearly two years, state officials have tried to get the city to comply with state law by inspecting each of Toledo's restaurants every year.

Last year, the state estimated that as many as 40 per cent of the city's restaurants were not being inspected annually.

Toledo health officials acknowledge they have not performed as expected, saying they need to hire additional inspectors.

State officials aren't so sure.

Although they won't speculate why Toledo's inspection unit is performing poorly, they say it has enough workers to do the job.

## ...AND WHO'S IN CHARGE



Dr. Joseph Fenwick, 63

Toledo Health  
Department director  
Annual salary: \$69,001



Dale Hertzfeld, 62

Acting chief,  
environmental/  
consumer health  
Annual salary: \$49,000



Bob Kurtz, 58

Acting health supervisor  
Annual salary: \$40,532

## Toledo has average caseload

CITY	Number of inspectors	Annual salary	Inspector caseload
Akron	4	\$24,500 to \$33,000	400
Columbus	10	\$23,980 to \$30,000	387
Cincinnati	9	\$29,549 to \$34,464	356
Toledo	8	\$26,166 to \$34,881	287
Dayton	13	\$22,000 to \$38,800	246
Youngstown	4	\$22,000 to \$30,000	175
Cleveland	24	\$24,600 to \$31,000	171

SOURCE: City health departments. Caseload is based on the number of food service operations and establishments requiring inspection. Inspectors' duties may vary from city to city. Dayton has a joint operation with Montgomery County.

latch onto the food and grow, placing diners at risk.

When health inspectors find such food they often throw it out and remind the restaurants of the rules.

But that does not always work.

Consider Dominic's Italian Restaurant, a popular date place at 2121 S. Reynolds Rd., across from Southwyck Mall.

# Kitchen

► Continued from Page 14

City records show it has a long history of keeping food at unsafe temperatures. It also has a history of diners complaining about getting sick.

Inspectors have not been able to link the two with 100 per cent certainty, largely because of the lack of leftovers to test.

But because other food has tested at unsafe temperatures, their suspicions are strong.

After a Dominic's customer complained of food poisoning in 1990, inspector Bob Kurtz found that all of the "hot" food on the buffet line was actually at room temperature.

Two years later, a caller reported to health officials that six people in a party of 12 started vomiting and having diarrhea after eating from the pasta buffet.

Inspector Kurtz again checked it out, finding the soup, lasagna, and chicken wings at unsafe temperatures.

In 1993, there was yet another food-poisoning complaint: Toledoan Rachel Franklin, 18, got sick after eating the chicken Tetrazzini.

Once again, inspector Kurtz investigated.

"But there were no leftovers to test," he says, "so I took a fresh sample [of the chicken Tetrazzini]."

When the lab tests came back, it showed significant levels of coliform — bacteria that can cause food poisoning.

"The problem was that they had left the food out at room temperature too long," Mr. Kurtz says.

In all, Dominic's has violated temperature rules seven times in the last nine years.

Dominic's manager Dennis Bowie says the temperature violations were caused by faulty equipment and lax monitoring.

Those problems have been solved, he says, adding that temperature problems are common in the industry. "Temperature is going to be a problem as long as there's hot food."

Dominic's latest inspection was in March. Then, the au jus, or beef juice, tested too cold.

So how long will inspectors allow this to continue?

Inspector Kurtz says he has no legal power to punish Dominic's because every time he finds food at unsafe temperatures, the restaurant throws it out or reheats it.

So, he says, Dominic's is following the rules.

State health department lawyer Carol Ray says the law is so vague that it is unclear how a judge would rule should an eatery be shut for repeat violations.

But new rules are in the works that would specifically allow inspec-

tors to punish longtime offenders.

"It's something we're looking at because of the frustration of local health departments," Ms. Ray says.

## Are complaints taken seriously?

One way Toledo keeps track of problems is through citizen complaints.

But that doesn't mean inspectors always respond to them quickly.

Sometimes it takes weeks — even months — for inspectors to investigate.

And 6 per cent of complaints are not checked at all, The Blade analysis found.

Last year, when a caller reported that a bar and restaurant in South Toledo did not have a men's toilet, just a hole with human waste on the floor, inspectors took 16 days to see that it was replaced.

Some complaints are ignored even longer.

In 1993, a caller reported that one North Toledo restaurant was "filthy dirty."

Eight weeks later, an inspector visited the restaurant and ordered the manager to clean up.

Dr. Fenwick, Toledo's health director, acknowledges the problem.

"The response time should be much quicker."

## Fixing system a daunting task

Toledo's troubles may get worse before they get better.

Starting in January, inspectors — who are not checking restaurants once a year — will be required under new state laws to hit them up to three times a year.

Traditional restaurants are to be inspected three times; others, like some fast-food places, twice a year.

"We'll need 10 more sanitarians to do the job," Inspector Kurtz says.

But Toledo's problems run deeper than a thin staff.

For one, inspection records are not computerized, so there is little tracking of trends and trouble spots.

And unlike Toledo, some communities take an aggressive stance with restaurateurs, posting inspection results and levying fines.

In Pittsburgh, Allegheny County officials last year filed criminal charges in 52 cases against restaurateurs, resulting in thousands of dollars in fines.

Toledo fined no one.

Those most dismayed by the local system may be the diners, such as Rachel Franklin, who reported getting food poisoning from Dominic's.

"You depend on [health officials] to do their job," she says. "You go out to eat expecting a healthy environment, not something that gets you sick."

## How the analysis was done

The Blade restaurant analysis is one of the first of its kind, says the Center for Science in the Public Interest, a Washington nonprofit group that monitors food safety.

For four months, reporters reviewed the inspection records of Toledo's 625 restaurants – from fine dining to neighborhood hot dog stands. Excluded were stores serving pre-packaged food only.

More than 15,000 Toledo Health Department public records were reviewed, including:

- Restaurants annual inspection reports, which list all violations found.
- Follow-up inspection reports, which show if restaurants have corrected previous infractions.
- Citizen complaints, along with an inspector's findings.

Because the health department does not computerize this data, reporters cataloged the information by hand and entered it into a computer.

Helping were Blade staff writer Mike Wilkinson, who set up the computer data base, and news assistant Jackie Powell, who entered the information into the computer.

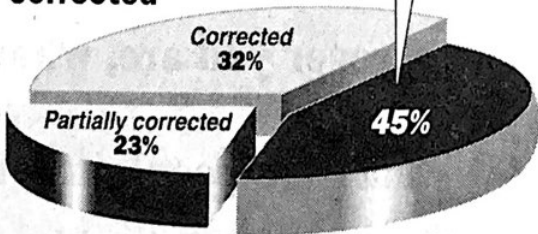
When the technical work was complete, reporters were able to answer questions that local health officials previously couldn't:

- Are officials inspecting every restaurant? How many are missed?
- Which restaurants have had the most violations? The most complaints?
- How many of Toledo's restaurants have had rats? Roaches?

The reporters also were able to compare the sanitary conditions at different kinds of restaurants. For example, are traditional restaurants cleaner than fast-food places?

Finally, reporters interviewed dozens of diners, restaurant owners, inspectors, and state and national food-safety officials.

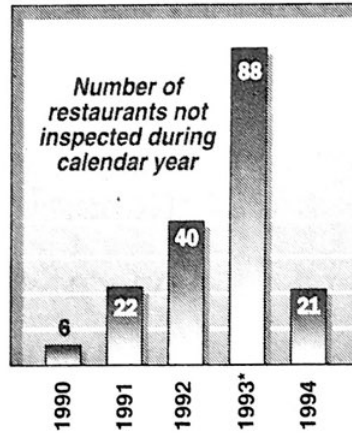
### How often violations are corrected



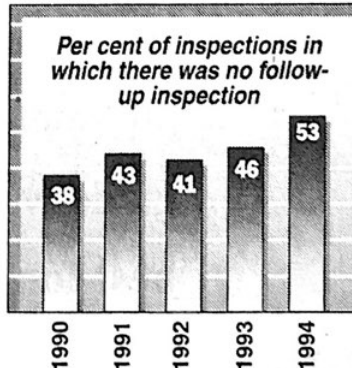
# A failed system, by the numbers

## 1 Missed inspections

By state law, local health departments must inspect restaurants at least once a year. A state audit last year estimated that as many as 40 per cent of Toledo's food service operations were not being inspected every 365 days. Here is how many restaurants have gone without an inspection for an entire calendar year, according to *The Blade* review:



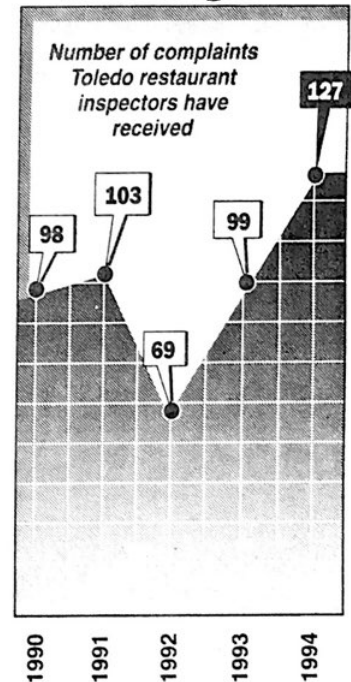
## 2 Fewer follow-ups



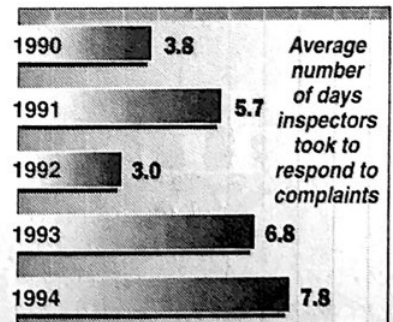
\* City health officials blame the sharp rise in missed inspections in 1993 on a lack of staff and worker turnover.

SOURCE: Toledo Health Department records

## 3 Citizen complaints increasing...



## 4 ...but response to complaints slowing



# How one restaurant battled rodents

BY SAM ROE  
AND MICHAEL D. SALLAH  
BLADE STAFF WRITERS

The new head of the Ohio Restaurant Association — Toledo restaurateur Michael Ostas — is no stranger to inspections: One of his family-run el Matador restaurants recently battled the worst rat problem any local restaurant has seen in years.

"Usually you don't see a rat infestation like this," Lucas County inspector Tracy Brown says. "Sometimes you see rats by Dumpsters, but you don't see them inside the restaurant."

Between August, 1994, and last April, county health inspectors examined the el Matador on Navarre Avenue in Oregon 23 times, records show. In most cases, they found rat droppings in the kitchen or storeroom.

Once, for a day, the restaurant voluntarily closed after a customer complained about the rats. Another time, workers set out glue traps — boards covered with glue — and caught two adult and three baby rats.

"This was the first time we have had a long-lasting problem that we couldn't get a handle on," Lucas County health supervisor Mike Oricko says.

Officials informally discussed closing the restaurant but allowed it to remain open because they believed customers were not in danger. "Shutting someone down is pretty serious business," Mr. Oricko

## Seven months, two exterminators later, war against rats was won

*It's not like we bred the damn things inside the building. . . . If you can't find the hole, and the exterminator . . . can't seem to correct the problem, what do you do? "*

**Michael Ostas**  
Operator of the el Matador chain

says, adding: "We never got to the point where we felt that a reasonable attempt to deal with the issue wasn't being taken" by el Matador.

Seven months after the first complaint, the rats were eliminated. Health officials have received no complaints since March.

And records show no signs of rats at the area's other three el Matador restaurants.

BLADE PHOTO BY DIANE HIRES



Mr. Ostas, 37, oversees the four restaurants. His father, Stan, founded the chain in 1976 and retains the title of president.

In June, Michael Ostas was elected president of the Ohio Restaurant Association, an educational and lobbying group with 2,400 members.

He says the rats at the el Matador at 3310 Navarre "perplexed me to no end" and that he worked nearly

daily to get rid of them.

The problem, he says, was that no one, including an exterminator, could determine where they were entering the building. Finally, he switched exterminators, and the hole was discovered: a small spot near the outside refrigeration line. Once that was plugged, he says, the rats disappeared.

During the ordeal, records show, inspectors ordered el Matador to do a better job cleaning — a problem health officials had experienced in the past with the restaurant.

Once, after inspector Brown found rat droppings under cooking equipment, an ice machine, and in a storeroom, she wrote that the "floor under these areas is not being cleaned as thoroughly as it should."

Mr. Ostas acknowledges his staff did not clean as well as it could have, but he says that did not contribute to the rat problem: "It's not like we bred the damn things inside the building."

Rats are dangerous because they spread diseases — some fatal. Their skin is covered with fleas and germs, and they can cause food



poisoning by tracking across dishes and leaving feces in food.

In 1994 and 1995, inspectors did not find evidence of these specific problems at the restaurant and records show no food-poisoning complaints during that time.

City and county health inspection records show that all four of Mr. Ostas's restaurants have been cited with violations in the 1990s — many of those repeat infractions, including mold on the ice machine, food containers stored on the floor, and cheese left unrefrigerated.

And since 1992, county officials have issued two “public health orders” — an uncommon move and the first step in taking legal action — to Mr. Ostas for failing to correct violations at the el Matadors on Holland-Sylvania Road and Airport Highway. Those infractions eventually were corrected.

Yet no problem has been as serious as the rats at the Navarre location.

That restaurant's latest inspection was in May: Inspectors found mold inside the ice machine, cheese left unrefrigerated, and dirt under the kitchen equipment.

But no rats.

Mr. Ostas says the rat problem was not indicative of the restaurant chain's overall record and his 20-year career: “If you can't find [the rat] hole, and the exterminator . . . can't seem to correct the problem, what do you do? What do you do?”

# Complaints of food poisoning up 70%

## Finding specific cause of illness can be difficult

BY MICHAEL D. SALLAH  
AND SAM ROE  
BLADE STAFF WRITERS

Somewhere in the skies over North Carolina, Jim Bartlebaugh started feeling queasy.

The 42-year-old had been at a sales conference in Toledo, and now, flying home, he thought he might be coming down with the flu.

But he soon learned it was more than a bug.

Mr. Bartlebaugh was among 68 people who complained of food poisoning, the biggest such incident in years at a Toledo restaurant.

Three people were hospitalized, including a pregnant woman, and 17

were treated by doctors during the 1993 ordeal. Most of the victims came down with severe diarrhea, cramps, and fevers.

"I was sick for a week," recalls Mr. Bartlebaugh, among 26 national salesmen for Maumee-based Aeroquip Corp. who became ill after dining together. They came from as far away as Washington state and Maine for a sales conference here.

The restaurant: Mountain Jack's on Airport Highway. The popular eatery had never experienced an outbreak before, nor has it since.

"We were very concerned about the reported cases of illness among some of our patrons," says Stephen York, Mountain Jack's district man-

ager, "and we took quick and decisive action two years ago when the incident occurred."

Among the changes, he says: increased training and closer monitoring of employee hygiene.

Food poisoning usually triggers sweats and chills, followed by vomiting and diarrhea. In some cases, it can be deadly, though no one locally has died of food poisoning in years.

Nationally, it's a different story: About 12,000 people have died in the last two years.

In Toledo, food-poisoning complaints against restaurants are up 70 per cent since 1990. Two dozen cases were reported last year — many involving numerous victims.

And those are just the reported cases: Up to 90 per cent go unreported, says the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, because people think they have caught the flu or another virus.

More disturbing, here and nationwide, is that common bacteria are showing resistance to antibiotics.

In fact, 1 in 4 staphylococcal infections — those caused by toxins in foods — are starting to show some drug-resistant strains.

"It's not enough that people are getting food poisoning today," says Caroline Smith DeWaal of the Center for Science in the Public Interest, a nonprofit group in Washington that monitors food safety. "Now, it's going to get more difficult to treat them."

Studies show that half of all food-poisoning outbreaks originate in restaurants, though officials usually cannot pinpoint the bacteria causing the illnesses. That's because often there is no evidence, such as left-over food, to test.

"These can be very difficult investigations," says Dr. James Metzger, Toledo Hospital's medical director of infection control.

While food illnesses typically are tied to bacteria, the Mountain

### COMMON BACTERIA

#### SALMONELLA

■ **Thrives in:** Meat, eggs, and milk left unrefrigerated.

■ **Symptoms:** Diarrhea, fever, cramps.

■ **Duration of illness:** Symptoms within 24 hours, lasting up to five days.

■ **Treatment:** Fluids and rest; antibiotics in severe cases.

#### CAMPYLOBACTER

■ **Thrives in:** Dairy products left unrefrigerated.

■ **Symptoms:** Diarrhea, fever, cramps.

■ **Duration of illness:** Symptoms within 48 hours, lasting a week or longer.

■ **Treatment:** Fluids and rest; antibiotics in severe cases.

#### BACILLUS CEREUS

■ **Thrives in:** Unrefrigerated cooked rice, cereals.

■ **Symptoms:** Vomiting, cramps.

■ **Duration of illness:** Symptoms

can occur within one hour, lasting up to 36 hours.

■ **Treatment:** Fluids, rest.

#### STAPHYLOCOCCUS

■ **Thrives in:** Any kind of food.

Spread by people carrying the bacteria and preparing the food.

■ **Symptoms:** Vomiting, diarrhea.

■ **Duration of illness:** Rapid onset of symptoms, usually lasting 24 hours.

■ **Treatment:** Fluids, rest.

#### NORWALK VIRUS

■ **Virus thrives in:** Digestive tract of humans. It can be introduced into food by food handlers suffering from diarrhea.

■ **Symptoms:** Fever, vomiting, diarrhea.

■ **Duration of illness:** Symptoms within 24 hours, lasting three to 10 days.

■ **Treatment:** Fluids, rest.

SOURCE: Dr. James Metzger, Toledo Hospital's medical director-infection control.

Jack's outbreak was believed to be triggered by a virus in the lettuce.

Investigators found that a worker who prepared the salads was sent home sick the day the Aeroquip sales group ate there.

Other kitchen workers were also ill that week in July, 1993, complaining of diarrhea and cramps.

The virus could have been transmitted in the salad from someone sneezing, coughing, or not washing their hands, inspectors say.

To help the victims, Mountain Jack's picked up their doctor bills and offered monetary settlements.

And shortly after the outbreak, Mountain Jack's General Manager Charles Zanto wrote to at least one victim, Michael Miller, of Maumee.

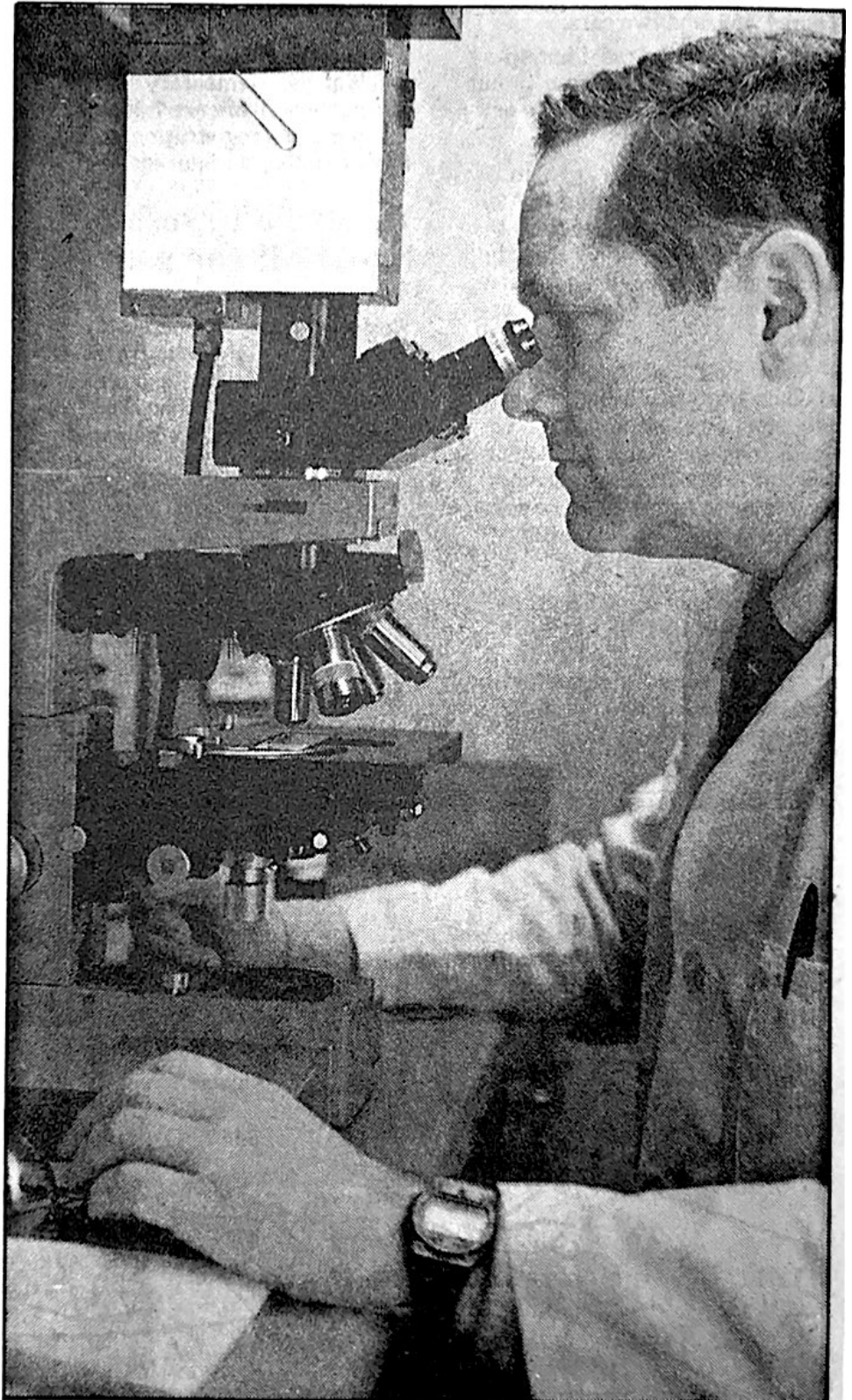
He assured him that Toledo health officials had given the restaurant a "preliminary clean bill of health, noting no problems with food, preparation techniques, equipment temperatures, etc."

However, a day after Toledo officials learned of the outbreak, inspector Robert Kurtz found several "critical" violations at the restaurant, including "badly soiled" cutting boards, turkey at unsafe temperatures, and "badly stained and soiled" food containers.

Mr. Zanto says that his letter to Mr. Miller and other victims was accurate and that his reference to a "clean bill of health" referred to inspectors' inability to determine the precise cause of the illnesses.

The restaurant's latest inspection was in December, 1994. Inspector Kurtz again found "badly soiled" cutting boards and food at unsafe temperatures — this time salad dressing.

Mr. York, Mountain Jack's district manager, says the condition of the kitchen today is "outstanding" and that inspectors' concerns have been addressed: New cutting boards are in place, and food temperatures are checked "religiously."



**Food-poisoning cases can be difficult investigations, says Dr. James Metzger of Toledo Hospital, because often there is no leftover food or stool samples to test.**