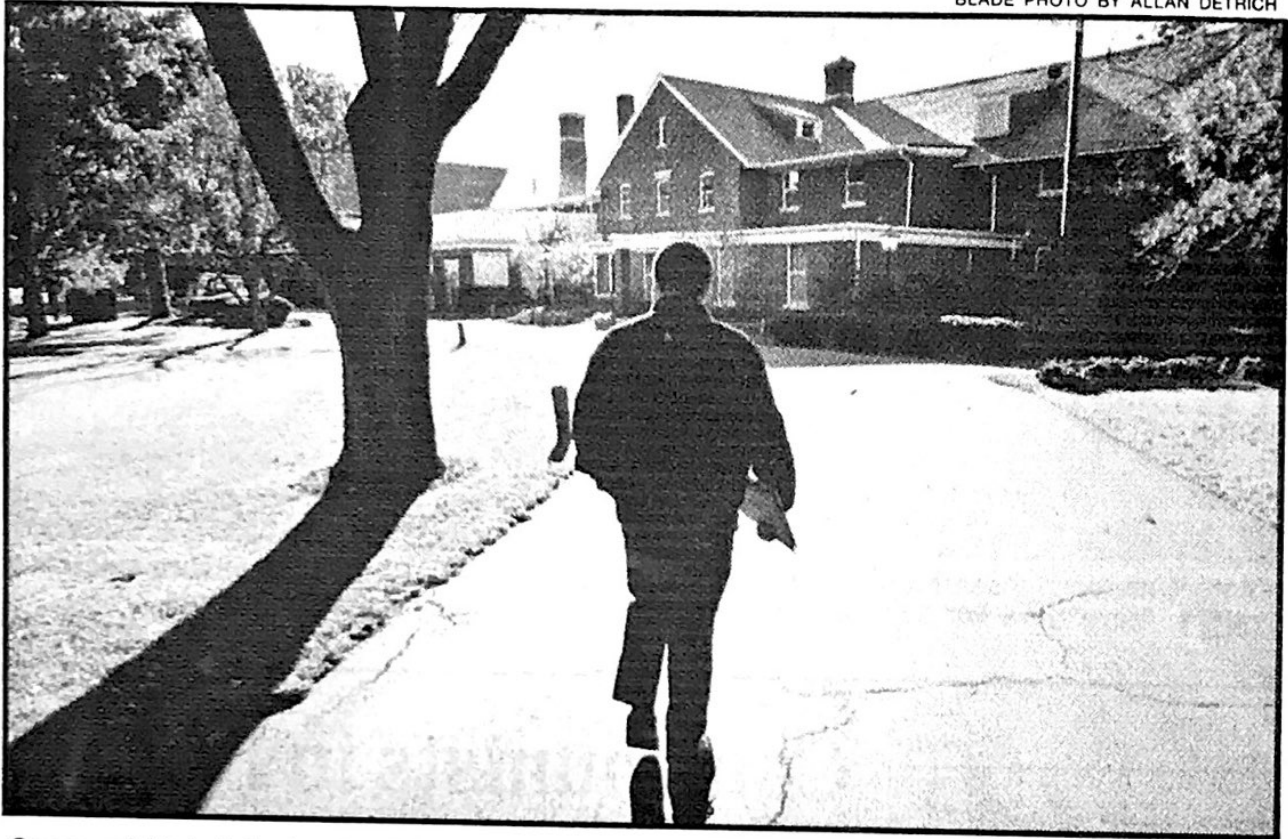


TOLEDO, OHIO, MONDAY, DECEMBER 4, 1995

## SPECIAL REPORT

### *Day two of a four-part series*

BLADE PHOTO BY ALLAN DETRICH



**Some of Toledo's best addresses, like the Inverness Club, have had problems too. Inspector Konni Sutfield walks up to the club to conduct his annual inspection.**

# PROBLEMS THAT LURK BEHIND FANCY FACADES

BY SAM ROE  
AND MICHAEL D. SALLAH  
BLADE STAFF WRITERS

You can't just waltz into the Skyline Club. First you must join. That costs \$250 a year. Then you take the elevator up the One SeaGate building downtown to the 28th floor — the highest point in Toledo.

The dining rooms, with names like "The Bay View" and "The Canal," offer ornate chandeliers and fresh-cut flowers. The bathrooms sport gold-plated fixtures.

But in the kitchen there has been dirt — and lots of it.

In fact, in 1993 city health inspector Bruce Mason ordered the Skyline to start a permanent cleaning program. When he returned last year, there were even more violations.

A miffed Mr. Mason wrote up the restaurant again: "Clean the inside and outside of all cooking equipment."

"Clean the inside and outside of all coolers."

"Stop using the pots and pans that are pitted since they are no longer cleanable."

The latest inspection report — this past April — was much improved: only one cleaning infraction.

"Fancy restaurants can have problems just as easily as a greasy hamburger joint down the road,"

## WHO'S WATCHING



## THE KITCHEN?

city health supervisor Dale Hertzfeld says.

A review by The Blade of more than 15,000 city records bears that out.

Inspection records, citizen complaints, and food-poisoning reports — documents diners rarely see — show that some of Toledo's most elegant and popular restaurants have had problems with inspections.

A Blade computer analysis of inspection reports of Toledo's

625 restaurants shows that from 1990 to 1994, country clubs, hotels, and private clubs had nearly 20 per cent more violations per inspection than other restaurants.

Restaurant owners give a variety of reasons for the health concerns at their establishments.

Skyline owner Chris Felix blames poor kitchen help for his past problems.

"You end up babysitting people to the point where you are almost holding their hands," he says.

But now, he says, a new chef has the Skyline in order.

Of course, not all fancy restaurants are troublesome nor all mom and pop foodstands spotless.

And health officials say decor guarantees nothing.

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# Fancy

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"There's a human element involved in all restaurants," Mr. Hertzfeld says. "People can make mistakes."

On average, inspectors find four infractions when they visit any restaurant. But that number is skewed by a few eateries with poor scores; indeed, half of all restaurants average three or fewer infractions.

Violations may be minor — like missing hoods on bathroom trashcans. But since 1990, two-thirds of all eateries have had at least one "critical" violation — a problem so severe that it must be fixed immediately, such as raw meat sitting out at room temperature.

And 1 in 12 have had rats, mice, or roaches — all which can cause disease by creeping across food.

But the extent of the problem may not be known because Toledo officials are not inspecting restaurants once a year as required by state law. And when they do, they often fail to re-inspect to ensure violations have been corrected.

## Problems in downtown area

If downtown Toledo ever has a renaissance, its restaurants will likely play a key role.

But many have had problems with inspections.

Start at the One SeaGate office tower, where, at ground level, the upscale Aztec Grille offers Angus Beef steaks, "Boston Fresh" seafood, and an expansive view of the Maumee.

It also owns an unenviable distinction: When combined with its predecessor, Ricardo's, the Aztec has been socked with more violations per inspection than any restaurant in town — 19.8.

A dirty kitchen has been the main problem. Last year, officials ordered the Aztec to clean all cooking equipment and to stop using pots and pans that were no longer washable.

"This kitchen needs to be better organized and maintained clean as needed!" inspector Bruce Mason

wrote. "This is to be done by permanently putting in place a cleaning program."

It must be working: The latest inspection reports were much improved.

The Aztec's owner is longtime restaurateur Chris Felix — the same man who runs the Skyline Club.

For several years, Mr. Felix ran the elegant Ricardo's at the Aztec location. Last year, he remodeled the restaurant and reopened it under the Aztec name.

"Quite honestly, [the inspectors] hit us on a bad period," Mr. Felix, 38, says.

The Aztec, he says, also was struggling with employee turnover: "By the time you train one, they leave. You train another one, they leave."

Now, he says, a better staff is in place, along with the cleaning program that inspectors had ordered.

And he doesn't mind inspectors one bit. "If we can't see what's wrong and someone else can, more power to them."

If it weren't for the Aztec Grille-Ricardo's, Theos Taverna, a few blocks away at 823 N. Summit St., would have historically the most violations per inspection: 19.2.

Under the new ownership of R.D. Hilton, the restaurant has dramatically improved its performance. In July, shortly after Mr. Hilton bought the restaurant, inspectors found only eight violations, and none of them critical.

The Greek restaurant, with its blues bands and choruses of Opa!, had serious problems in past years.

In 1993, someone complained about rodents behind the kitchen coolers. Mouse traps were set, but the mice crawled into the traps, ate the poison, and crawled right back out, only to die and rot in hard-to-reach corners. This caused a stench in the restaurant.

Inspectors have found no evidence of mice in the restaurant since.

Last year, there was a more serious problem: rats.

According to city health records, Theos's former owner Ted Arvanitis blamed the alley behind his restaurant. That's where the rats were coming from, he said.

Inspector Dan Dragt wanted to

see for himself.

He first checked the alley but found no rats there. Then he went into Theos's courtyard patio. There, he saw a rat skitter under the dining booths.

Today, new owner R.D. Hilton says the rats are gone.

He and his wife, Debbie, bought the restaurant in July, and after seeing a rat "a couple of times" on the patio he hired an exterminator, who quickly corrected the problem.

Plus, he says, he has been re-doing the floors and counters and

and diarrhea. She had to leave work early and called in sick the next day. All the while she thought she had the flu.

Then she heard that her three colleagues had also become sick.

Suspicious, Ms. Pompili called city health officials, who checked out the illnesses.

What they found was that roughly 15 customers had become sick after eating at Sufficient Grounds — one of the largest suspected food-illness cases in recent years in Toledo.

And when officials inspected the

*6 We did see a dead mouse in the corner in the past, but lately we haven't, and it does look as though things have improved somewhat. 9*

**Muriel Nicewonder**

*Member of Trend-Setters commenting on Uncle John's Pancake House*

cleaning everything in sight — improvements not lost on customers.

"I have gotten so many compliments," he says.

Still, Mr. Hilton, 42, says he understands how a restaurant like his could have rats.

"I mean this is Toledo. And this is waterfront. And how can you keep them out of a courtyard?"

Back in the heart of downtown, at Madison Avenue and Superior Street, is Sufficient Grounds, perhaps the hippest coffee shop in town.

Here, employees serve vegetarian sandwiches and gourmet coffee to a bustling office crowd.

One day this past January, Sue Pompili and three of her colleagues from a local health maintenance organization walked over for lunch.

The next day, Ms. Pompili was floored by severe stomach cramps

coffee house they found numerous "critical" problems, including not heating the soups properly and keeping milk at an extremely unsafe temperature — 80 degrees.

But inspector John Neeper doubted the milk or soup were to blame for the illnesses, largely because most of the diners had not eaten those foods. Instead, he speculated that employees with flu-like symptoms may have spread the illness to customers.

In any event, Sufficient Grounds has "greatly improved," according to a recent inspection report.

And owner Jody DeBacker says her staff corrected all violations found during the food-illness investigation.

She speculates the customers coincidentally had the flu, not food poisoning, and notes that the coffee

## Inside the kitchen

### TYPICAL VIOLATIONS

- Dirty ovens, can openers, dishes, and restrooms.
- Food left uncovered.
- Dishes not sanitized properly.
- Food stored near toxic chemicals.
- Food stored at unsafe temperatures, which can cause bacteria growth. (Cold foods must be held at 45 degrees or below; hot foods, 140 or above.)

### HOW OFTEN INSPECTORS FIND...

Rodents .....	5%
Roaches .....	5%
Food at unsafe temperatures .....	38%
Dishes not washed properly .....	23%

SOURCE: Toledo Health Department inspection records. Percentages are based on the number of Toledo restaurants cited for the above problems at least once since 1990.

house has not had a complaint since.

"With all the people we serve, the incidence of our complaints are really small — something we strive for."

Other popular restaurants around town have struggled. One example: Uncle John's Pancake House, 3131 Secor Rd.

For more than 30 years, the pancake house has served up breakfast to West Toledoans. The chocolate chip pancakes, blueberry waffles, and corned beef hash have attracted young and old alike.

Civic groups like the conference room: the Compass Club, the Buckeye Toastmasters, and the Trend-Setters all meet here.

But not everyone has been pleased.

One Apollo Toastmaster wrote to health officials in 1990, recounting a morning meeting.

"Being some of the morning's first customers, we expected to find things spotless and clean," he wrote. "The conditions we did find were quite unsanitary and made our appetite vanish."

He said the floor, seats, and glasses were dirty, the table was sticky, and fruit flies were buzzing in and out of the ketchup bottle.

Inspectors, too, were concerned about the sanitation, records show. But conditions didn't improve much.

In 1993, several people complained about mice. One citizen said they were "everywhere: silverware drawers, counters, cupboards, restrooms."

Inspector Konni Sutfield ordered Uncle John's to clean up, and the mice disappeared.

But other troubles persisted.

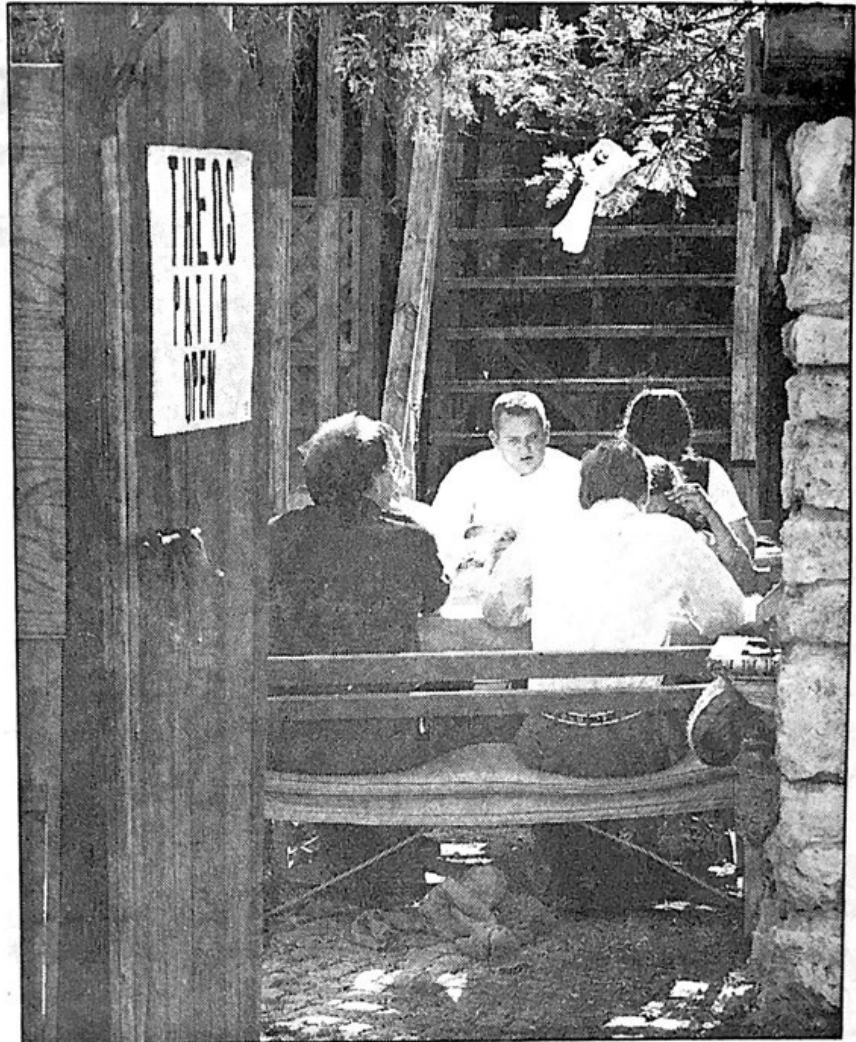
Last year, Uncle John's was hit with 22 violations, and in May, inspectors found 40 — one of the worst report cards any Toledo restaurant has received in years.

Uncle John's was ordered to clean its stoves, ovens, restrooms, cutting boards, can opener, meat slicer, and all floors and walls.

The Toastmaster group quit meeting there a couple of years ago citing restaurant conditions, but the Trend-Setters, part of the Toastmasters, stayed. Both help people improve their public speaking.

"We did see a dead mouse in the corner in the past," says the Trend-Setters's Muriel Nicewonder, "but lately we haven't, and it does look as though things have improved somewhat."

When asked about the violations, Uncle John's owner Paul Baumann says, "The health department has a job to do, and anywhere they go they are going to find things."



Diners eat lunch on Theos patio, where rats were seen last year and this year. New owner R.D. Hilton says they are now gone.

He says he corrects all violations and is constantly remodeling. "Basically, we are clean," he says.

The mice, he says, are long gone, and the Toastmasters did not leave voluntarily: He says he booted them out because they reneged on an agreement to spend a certain amount of money per person.

"We would make \$5 or \$6 dollars off them, and there were 20 of them back there" in the restaurant's meeting room, which he offered at no cost.

## Elegant clubs too can be bugged

Besides the Skyline, other private clubs in Toledo have had health

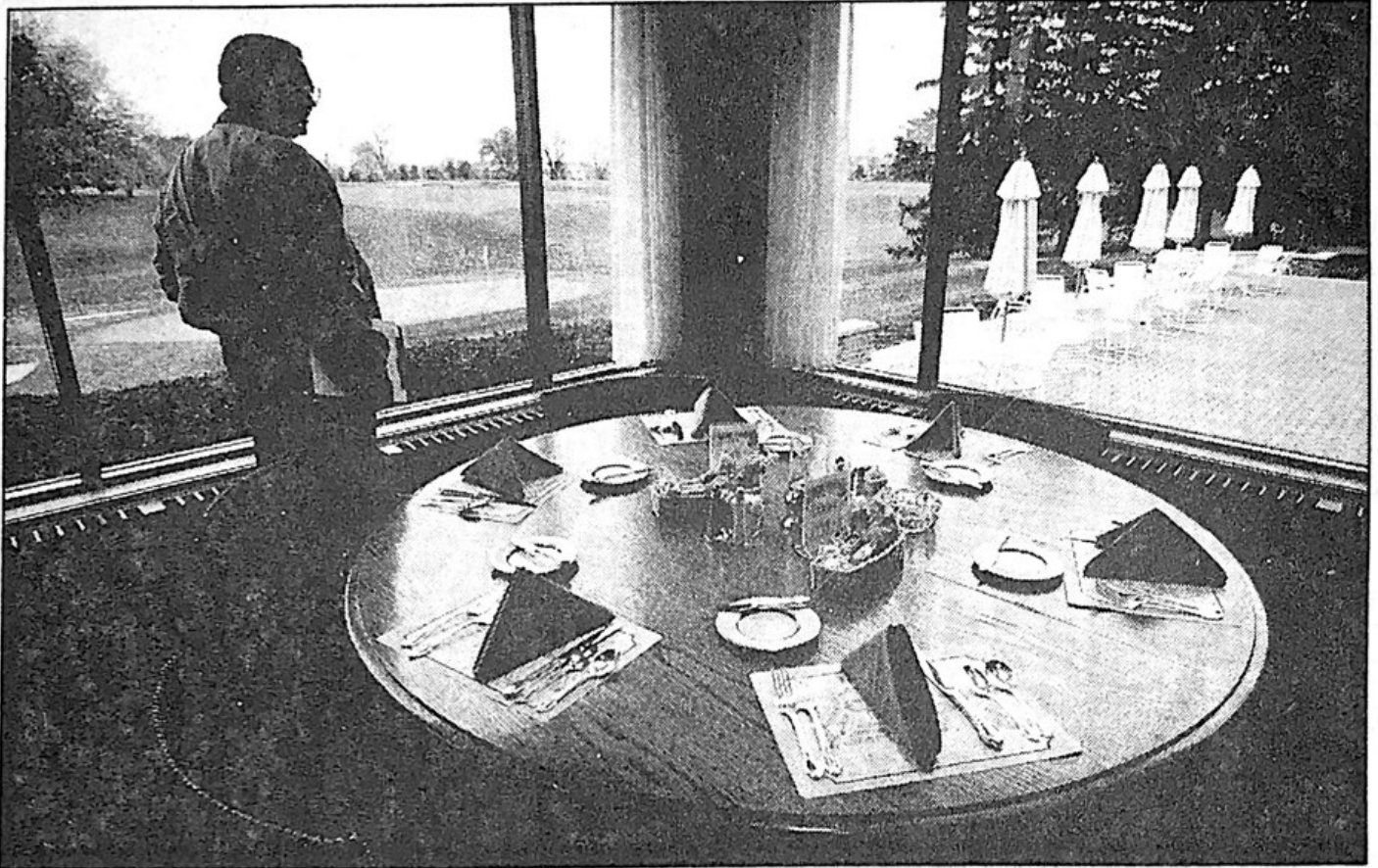
concerns.

Take the Inverness Club, host to seven golf championships since 1920.

For a \$14,000 initiation fee and \$310 a month, one can walk in the footsteps of golf legends Byron Nelson, Bobby Jones, and Gene Sarazen; toast champagne at poolside, and mingle at black-tie dinners with some of the richest and most powerful people in town.

But despite the elegance, Inverness has faced, at times, a stubborn sanitary problem: cockroaches.

From 1983 to 1991 the storied country club at 4601 Dorr St. fought the bugs — one of the longest-running roach problems recorded in Toledo health department files.



**Inspector Konni Sutfield checks the dining room of the Inverness Club. In past years, the club fought roaches. Inverness says — and records agree — the bugs have been gone since 1991.**

One citizen reported seeing a roach floating in a member's glass. Another found two in the salad during a luncheon for St. Ursula Academy. Still another saw them on the dining room tables during a wedding reception.

Inspectors saw the bugs, too, one calling them in 1988 a "serious infestation."

Inverness emphatically says — and inspection records back the club up — that the roaches have been gone since 1991.

"I'm very proud of the way our kitchen looks today," Inverness general manager Donald Abel says.

He acknowledges that when he took over as manager in 1991 he immediately noticed the bugs.

"When you walk in the door, you are aware that there's cockroaches."

And though an exterminator had been battling the bugs, the problem wasn't going away. So, Mr. Abel

says, he hired a new exterminator, and the roaches were eliminated and have never come back.

An inspection last month revealed no bugs, but inspector Konni Sutfield found dirt on the kitchen equipment, under the stoves, and on the floor of the walk-in coolers.

At Belmont Country Club, another exclusive club in the area, keeping the kitchen clean has been the problem.

In 1991, Wood County inspector Phil Hartz found a "tremendous amount of accumulated grease and dirt" on the grill's hood vents, records show. Last year, he ordered the country club, 29601 Bates Rd. in Perrysburg Township, to clean all stoves, microwaves, walls, and kitchen food preparation surfaces.

An inspection this past March reported that sanitation has improved — a fact Belmont General Manager Gary Kovach attributes to adding two more kitchen workers.

## Restaurants with 10 or more violations per inspection

Violations may range from minor infractions, such as no paper towels in restrooms, to serious problems, such as food left unrefrigerated. This list reflects only a restaurant's average number of violations. It does not reflect the seriousness of the infractions. Plus, health officials say a high number of violations does not necessarily suggest a bad operation. Kitchen size, staff turnover, and customer volume may all affect the numbers. The average number of violations per inspection for all Toledo restaurants is 3.9.

Restaurant	Address	Average number of violations per inspection, 1990-94
<b>Aztec Grille-Ricardo's</b> (Latest inspection: July 26, 1995; violations: 11)	One SeaGate	<b>19.8</b>
<b>Theos Taverna &amp; Restaurant*</b> (Latest inspection: July 26, 1995; violations: 8)	823 N. Summit St.	<b>19.2</b>
<b>Original Pancake House</b> (Latest inspection: Oct. 11, 1995; violations: 28)	3310 W. Central Ave.	<b>19.0</b>
<b>China Gate by Wang</b> (Latest inspection: Dec. 21, 1994; violations: 10)	4962 Monroe St.	<b>17.2</b>
<b>Carly Cheena's</b> (Now closed.)	1430 N. Reynolds Rd.	<b>16.6</b>
<b>Timko's Soup'n Such</b> (Latest inspection: July 24, 1995; violations: 7)	2502 W. Sylvania Ave.	<b>16.5</b>
<b>Chick-N-Joy</b> (Latest inspection: July 19, 1995; violations: 9)	5406 N. Summit St.	<b>14.4</b>
<b>J.J.'s Aqua Lounge</b> (Latest inspection: July 22, 1994; violations: 14)	159 Matzinger Rd.	<b>14.2</b>
<b>Mexican Supreme</b> (Latest inspection: June 12, 1995; violations: 18)	Franklin Park Mall	<b>14.0</b>
<b>Chaplin's Lounge</b> (Latest inspection: Feb. 8, 1995; violations: 8)	5429 N. Summit St.	<b>13.6</b>
<b>Wendy's</b> (Latest inspection: Jan. 3, 1995; violations: 5)	3454 Dorr St.	<b>13.5</b>
<b>Uncle John's Pancake House</b> (Latest inspection: May 4, 1995; violations: 39)	3131 Secor Rd.	<b>13.3</b>
<b>New Chet's</b> (Latest inspection: Sept. 11, 1995; violations: 13)	1024 E. Manhattan Blvd.	<b>12.8</b>
<b>Hilton Hotel restaurant</b> (Latest inspection: Nov. 16, 1994; violations: 28)	3100 Glendale Ave.	<b>12.6</b>
<b>Johnny's Steak House</b> (Latest inspection: May 16, 1995; violations: 15)	1240 S. Reynolds Rd.	<b>12.3</b>
<b>Adam's Place</b> (Latest inspection: Nov. 18, 1994; violations: 3)	2417 W. Laskey Rd.	<b>12.2</b>
<b>Family Affair Restaurant</b> (Latest inspection: Oct. 18, 1995; violations: 7)	4873 N. Summit St.	<b>12.2</b>
<b>Jo-Jo's Original Pizzeria</b> (Latest inspection: Jan. 25, 1995; violations: 13)	4336 Monroe St.	<b>12.0</b>
<b>Toledo Yacht Club</b> (Latest inspection: April 27, 1995; violations: 5)	Bay View Park	<b>10.8</b>
<b>Hot Dog Johnny's</b> (Latest inspection: May 24, 1995; violations: 11)	614 Lagrange St.	<b>10.7</b>
<b>Los Amigos Family Restaurant</b> (Latest inspection: March 21, 1995; violations: 6)	3236 Stickney Ave.	<b>10.6</b>
<b>The Elbo Room</b> (Latest inspection: March 7, 1995; violations: 10)	3515 W. Alexis Rd.	<b>10.4</b>
<b>Nick &amp; Jimmy's Bar &amp; Grill</b> (Latest inspection: Nov. 29, 1994; violations: 7)	4956 Monroe St.	<b>10.2</b>
<b>The Dorr Street Cafe</b> (Latest inspection: March 10, 1995; violations: 7)	5243 Dorr St.	<b>10.0</b>
<b>Big Boy Family Restaurant</b> (Latest inspection: April 3, 1995; violations: 4)	3537 Secor Rd.	<b>10.0</b>
<b>Yours &amp; Ours Nightclub**</b> (Latest inspection: March 23, 1995; violations: 7)	3325 Stickney Ave.	<b>10.0</b>

\* Ownership changed in 1995

\*\* Ownership changed in 1994

# Restaurants with the most 'critical' violations

Some violations are defined by the state as "critical," or those that must be corrected immediately. The average number of critical violations per inspection for all Toledo restaurants is 0.6.

Restaurant	Address	Average number of 'critical' violations per inspection, 1990-94
<b>Alice Harvey's Place</b> (Out of business in April, 1995)	2521 Glendale Ave.	<b>4.0</b>
<b>Original Pancake House</b> (Latest inspection: Oct. 11, 1995; critical violations: 3)	3310 W. Central Ave.	<b>3.0</b>
<b>Original Hot Dog Johnny</b> (Latest inspection: Nov. 28, 1994; critical violations: 0)	4102 Airport Hwy.	<b>3.0</b>
<b>China Gate by Wang</b> (Latest inspection: Dec. 21, 1994; critical violations: 3)	4962 Monroe St.	<b>2.8</b>
<b>Hilton Hotel restaurant</b> (Latest inspection: Nov. 16, 1994; critical violations: 4)	3100 Glendale Ave.	<b>2.8</b>
<b>Mountain Jack's</b> (Latest inspection: Dec. 1, 1994; critical violations: 1)	5335 Airport Hwy.	<b>2.6</b>
<b>Ground Round Restaurant</b> (Latest inspection: Dec. 18, 1994; critical violations: 1)	5806 Telegraph Rd.	<b>2.6</b>
<b>Raceway Park clubhouse</b> (Latest inspection: Feb. 28, 1995; critical violations: 0)	5700 Telegraph Rd.	<b>2.5</b>
<b>China Gate</b> (Out of business in August, 1994)	2450 S. Reynolds Rd.	<b>2.5</b>
<b>Olga's Kitchen</b> (Latest inspection: Dec. 16, 1994; critical violations: 0)	343 New Towne Square Dr.	<b>2.4</b>

Source: Toledo Health Department annual inspection records of Class II and III food service operations. Only restaurants with at least four annual inspections from 1990 to 1994 were included.



# Hospital execs fall ill at Maumee Bay retreat

## Ambrosia salad was suspected in food-poisoning

BY MICHAEL D. SALLAH  
AND SAM ROE  
BLADE STAFF WRITERS

For the executives of Toledo Hospital, it was to be a retreat at scenic Maumee Bay State Park.

For two days, they would plan the hospital's future at the Lake Erie resort.

That is, until dinner was served.

By the time the October, 1994, conference ended, most of the 18 executives — including CEO and President Dan Rissing — were suffering from cramps and diarrhea.

It was a suspected outbreak of food-borne sickness.

"I've been sick before, but that was by far the worst," recalls Robert Loepp, a Toledo Hospital vice president. The 44-year-old vomited so much he became dehydrated.

The episode shattered the serenity of what was to be a brainstorming session at one of Ohio's most celebrated resort parks.

And it remains an ironic example of how food-borne illnesses can strike anytime, even to health care officials in the best of places.

"It was embarrassing for some of those who were involved," Lucas County health supervisor Mike Oricko says.

It all began Oct. 25, 1994, the day the executives arrived for their annual retreat at the park, seven miles east of Toledo.

After several hours of meetings, the executives gathered in a banquet room for cocktails and hors d'oeuvres. Then the restaurant staff served a dinner buffet, featuring ambrosia fruit salad and beef burgundy.

The next morning, the executives were feeling funny. At few hours later, it was worse.

Dana Fike, 47, an assistant to the president, complained of cramps

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*“The evidence shows it was a food-borne illness. We didn't have the smoking gun — but we had the [victims] . . . We were very confident in our investigation.”*

**Mike Oricko**  
Lucas County health supervisor

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and diarrhea.

Bob Adams, 58, a vice president for development, was hit with the same symptoms.

Mr. Rissing, 50, experienced stomach pains and diarrhea. He declined to comment for this article.

Although the retreat continued as scheduled, it was uncomfortable for many.

"One of the guys was throwing up most of the night," recalls Dr. John Newton, the hospital's medical affairs director, who did not attend the retreat.

After the conference was over, Dr. Newton, who learned of the ordeal from colleagues, tipped off county inspectors about a possible food-poisoning outbreak.

Inspectors eventually discovered that 10 of the 18 executives had gotten sick.

But officials were unable to get stool samples from the victims, as most of the food had already passed through their systems.

And they couldn't test the food, since there were no leftovers.

Still, there was a clue: A buffet item popular among those who became sick was the ambrosia fruit salad.

"What we found was that the people who didn't eat the fruit salad never got sick," says Mr. Oricko, the county health supervisor.

Officials suspected the ambrosia salad — typically made with mayonnaise or whipped cream — may have been left out at room temperature too long, causing bacteria to grow. The suspected organism: *Bacillus cereus*.

"The evidence shows it was a food-borne illness. We didn't have the smoking gun — the bacteria — but we had the [victims] and the other factors," Mr. Oricko says. "We were very confident in our investigation."

The private company that operates the resort's restaurant, TW Recreational Services of Spartanburg, S.C., says it reviewed its food-handling procedures and found no wrongdoing.

"We have strict procedures for food-handling," company spokesman Karen Randall says. "We try to go above and beyond what we need to do to ensure every meal we serve is a pleasant experience."

The company would not speculate how the Toledo Hospital executives became sick.

Since the outbreak, there has been one other food-poisoning complaint at the restaurant.

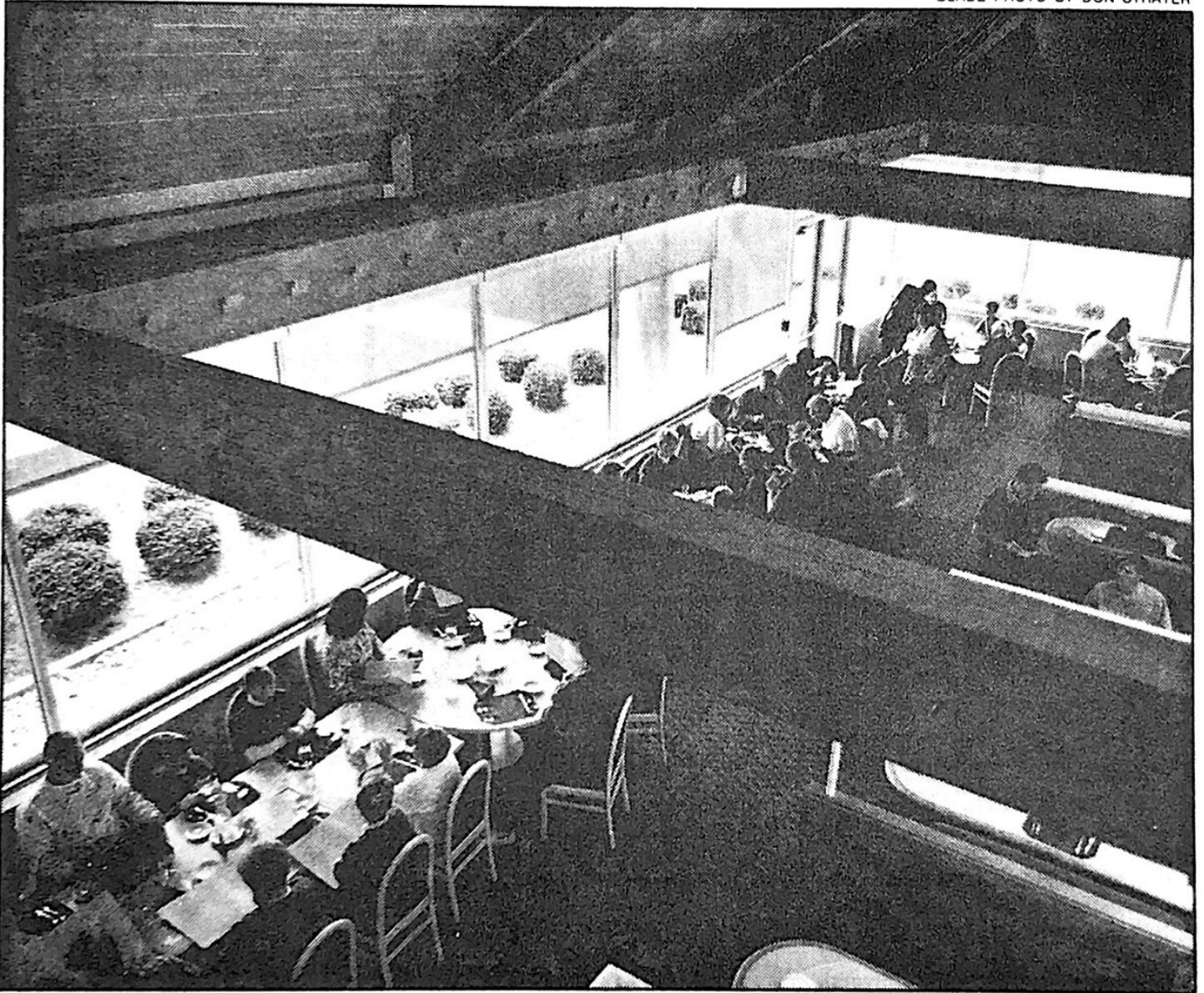
This past May, a woman reported becoming sick after eating smothered chicken and sirloin steak. Inspectors did not find anything wrong at the restaurant.

The latest annual inspection was in June. Seventeen violations were noted, including mold in the ice machines and dirt on the can opener and under the kitchen equipment. No temperature infractions were found.

The executives who became ill at the restaurant say they won't soon forget it.

"I suffered through the entire next day and never made it back to the conference," Mr. Loepp recalls. "I was so weak I could barely get out of bed."

BLADE PHOTO BY DON STRAYER



**Maumee Bay's restaurant is popular among local residents. After the food-poisoning outbreak, the company that runs the restaurant says it reviewed its procedures and found no wrongdoing.**