



TRANS MISSION

Is Seattle preparing to drive deadly fat out of town? BY MONICA FISCHER

WHEN DOES A slow-rolling trend become a speeding train? Just about the time Starbucks hops aboard.

In January, the local coffee giant announced that the food sold in its company-owned stores (as opposed to licensed locations, such as airport or grocery store kiosks) in Seattle and nine other cities would no longer contain artery-clogging trans fat, and that foods containing the chemically altered fat would be banned from all of its stores in the United States and Canada by the end of the year. The announcement gave

momentum to an anti-trans fat movement that has been spreading recently from coast to coast. In the past year, KFC, Wendy's, Taco Bell and Universal Studios have dumped the harmful additive—which provides a longer shelf life for baked goods and a longer fry life for cooking oils, and lends some foods, such as doughnuts, a pleasing texture or mouthfeel—from all or part of their menus. In December 2006, the New York City Board of Health voted to ban trans fats in restaurants citywide. The unprecedented ban begins this

July, when New York City's restaurants will be barred from using oils, shortenings and spreads that contain trans fat. By July 1, 2008, all baked goods and deep-fried desserts must also be trans fat free.

The bad rap on trans fat—which results when liquid vegetable oils are combined with hydrogen and transformed into solid fats such as vegetable shortenings and some margarines—has been trickling into the public consciousness for the past few years. But an article written in part by Harvard Medical School researchers in *The New England Journal of Medicine* in April 2006 helped to distill the

health risks: Trans fat raises LDL, or "bad" cholesterol, and lowers HDL, or "good" cholesterol, thereby increasing your risk of heart disease and stroke.

According to Erin MacDougall—program manager for Healthy Eating and Active Living, an initiative of the Prevention Division of Public Health, Seattle & King County—this article may have spurred the recent rash of citywide bans under consideration (at press time Chicago, Boston and Boca Raton, Florida, were all considering citywide trans fat bans). It's a move the King County Board of Health is now mulling over, in part because of a call to arms from Seattle Mayor Greg Nickels. Last April, in a letter to Board of Health chair Julia Patterson, the mayor wrote, "I urge the Board of Health to hold public hearings on trans fat and consider other steps to severely limit consumption of food products made with or fried even partially in hydrogenated vegetable oils." Eight months later, the board began to do just that.

"Trans fat is comparable to lead in paint," says MacDougall, who is part of the team responding to the mayor's request. "It is not necessary, and it is harmful to

health. As a cautionary principle, we need to get rid of it."

At the Board of Health meeting on December 15, a panel of health professionals, which included MacDougall, briefed the board on the health risks of trans fat. At press time, the board was expected to continue gathering information over the next several months, including examining what steps New York City took leading up to its ban. The resulting course of action could include educational programs, countywide regulations or a combination of the two.

Starbucks, though, didn't wait for the board to act—and neither did one of its most popular local suppliers.

While Starbucks was loudly announcing its freedom from trans fat, locally owned Top Pot Doughnuts was quietly undertaking a revolution of its own. Working with a Midwest lab, owners Mark and Michael Klebeck began researching trans-fat-free alternatives to their cooking oils in mid-2005. By the end of 2006, 99 percent of Top Pot's products had been liberated of trans fat. Only some of the icings used on their pastries awaited transformation. Across town, Wallingford's Mighty O Donuts went 100 percent trans fat free in January 2006.

So far, the potential ouster of trans fats in King County doesn't seem to have drawn any public resistance, though the National Restaurant Association, which was a vocal opponent in New York City, is against any municipal ban on trans fat. "The National Restaurant Association agrees that it is important to move away from trans fat in oils and products consumed in restaurants," the organization said in a statement released to the media last December. "However, the challenges and unintended consequences of the proposal to ban trans fat within a specified time frame is unworkable. It takes time to develop, plant, grow, harvest and process new alternative crops and to test new oils."

It will be months before the Board of Health decides if other restaurants and bakeries must follow in Top Pot and Starbucks' footsteps, and it's possible that local opponents will surface during the Board's exploratory process. But despite potential grumblings, it seems likely that a city known (however reluctantly) as "metronatural" will be eager to give the boot to trans fat—a decidedly unnatural product. **3**

THE FDA RECOMMENDS THAT CONSUMERS LIMIT THEIR TRANS FAT INTAKE TO 2.2 GRAMS PER DAY. THE AVERAGE DAILY TRANS FAT INTAKE FOR AMERICAN ADULTS IS 5.8 GRAMS.



Gauzy curtains and gauzy light at Barolo

{ BEST AMBIENCE }

One cannot dine on food alone—without a great space, we might never get out of the house for dinner

Best Meal You Can Have Without a Reservation

UNION

DOWNTOWN, 1600 FIRST AVE.; 206.438.6000;
UNIONSEATTLE.COM

It's still kind of a head-scratcher that one of the city's best restaurants is so seldom at max capacity. Happily for us, though, that means that Union is a great option for a spontaneous dinner downtown. And, being open for dinner nightly with a bar menu until midnight, it's an even better option on those slim-pickings Sundays or for a late-night bite.

Best Rebirth

PIKE BREWING COMPANY

PIKE PLACE MARKET, 1415 FIRST AVE.;
206.432.6044; PIKEBREWING.COM

Charles and Rose Ann Finkel founded the Pike Place Brewery in 1989 (making beer for seven years before moving to the current space and adding a restaurant) and sold the business in 1997 to enjoy retirement. Not that they didn't enjoy retirement, but they bought Pike back and are breathing much-needed new life into the place by promoting Drew Cluley to head

brewer and by bringing back old favorite brews, plus new craft creations such as Monk's Uncle Tripel Ale. They're also updating the menu to include an increased emphasis on sustainable foods and local organic bounty. And they're creating a mini beer museum on-site, showcasing just some of the amazing brewing artifacts they've collected over the years. Truly a renaissance for a Seattle favorite.

Most Effective Use of French Clichés to Create a Genuinely Charming Experience

ST. GERMAIN

MADISON VALLEY, 2811A E MADISON ST.;
206.323.9000

Yes, there is an accordion at the ready at St. Germain, and yes, there are black-and-white photographs of Paris architecture on the walls, but somehow the effect of this tiny little wine bar is still appealing, not theme-parky. This is in no small part thanks to host and owner Jean-Michel Omès, whose real, not simulated, French charm animates the room late into the night.

Best Reason to Put on High Heels for Dinner

CRUSH

MADISON VALLEY, 2319 E MADISON ST.;

206.322.7874; CHIEFJASONWILSON.COM

Seattle is hopelessly casual, and one can easily feel overdressed in many of its restaurants, but Crush, which brings a rarely seen chicness to the scene, is ready to play dress-up with you, with warm incandescent light, elegant servers and a general sense of cocktail party merriment in the air. The high-style Pantone chairs might not be the most comfortable on the planet, but then, neither are your stilettos.

Best Deck

RAY'S CAFÉ

BALLARD, 4049 SEAVIEW AVE. SW; 206.752.0094;
RAYS.COM

All those tourists are on to something. You've probably read it before, but until someone puts a restaurant on a barge in the middle of the Sound, you won't get a better place to soak in the midsummer sun than Ray's Café deck.

BEST EXPANSIONS (WE HOPE!)

Two of our favorite restaurants have gone through huge changes this year: **MATT'S IN THE MARKET** (*Pike Place Market, 94 Pike St., Suite 32; 206.467.7909; mattsinthemarket.com*), which by now should have reopened with more space, a new kitchen and a retroed interior, and **OSTERIA LA SPIGA** (*Capitol Hill, 1429 12th Ave.; 323.8881; laspiga.com*) which moved from the Harvard Market building to the impossibly chic Piston building at 12th Avenue and Pike Street this past December. Both restaurants thrived in their smaller guises, and we really hope Matt Janke, and Pietro Borghese and Sabrina Tinsley can finally make some real money now that they have more seats to fill. But there's a part of us that mourns the loss of the old, where both restaurants made the most of unlikely spaces. Here's to new beginnings, but with a sense of history. S.D.

Best Lighting

BAROLO RISTORANTE

DOWNTOWN, 1940 WESTLAKE AVE.; 206.776.8000;
BAROLOSEATTLE.COM

There is something dreamy and gauzy about the lighting at Barolo, the new poshly decorated Italian restaurant—a certain indirect glow highlighted in spots with mirrors, sparkly chandeliers and candlelight. Think of it as live-action airbrushing.

Best Mezzanine

DOWNTOWN TOP POT DOUGHNUTS

DOWNTOWN, 2124 FIFTH AVE.; 206.728.1966

You could call the mezzanine at Top Pot downtown the Flight Deck, because the place has a pre-moon landing, futuristic rocket ship vibe—albeit a rocket ship with a full library, the kind where the crew wears smoking jackets. Plus there are doughnuts, essential to any space mission.

Most Festive Private

Dining Room

LE SALON DU JARDIN CRÉMANT

MADRONA, 1623 34TH AVE.; 206.322.4600; CREMANTSEATTLE.COM

There are few more jubilant private dining rooms than Crémant's little outbuilding, painted cream and green and dominated by a stretched-out table that can fit 18 people. On warm nights, you can spill out into Crémant's courtyard and enjoy the balmy air. The room is on the noisy side, so keep in mind that it's best for real parties rather than solemn occasions.

COURTESY: THOMAS BARBERO

Your own private dining room at Crémant



PHOTO: THOMAS BARBERO