

BANKRUPTCY CORRECTIONS

CRN has learned that some information in the last edition concerning the Mariano T. Garcia bankruptcies was incorrect or out of date. The bankruptcy filed in 1995 was dismissed, according to Mr. Garcia's attorney. The August 2004 Chapter 7 Oakland Division petition was converted to a Chapter 11 bankruptcy on October 22. On November 10, the creditor matrix was amended. November 30, a stipulated order converted the case back to Chapter 7. Case No. is 04-44755EJD7.

Assets include a jointly-owned 43-foot boat bought for \$160,000 in 2003, Hull No. 986056. Assets are summed as \$128,780.47. Liabilities are listed as \$587,401.

Creditors listed in August were: Almar Corporation, American Express, Capital One Visa, Columbus Distributing, Dr. Wm. B. Claussen DDS, East Bay Cash Register Systems, Ford Motor Credit, Fred Freuh, Garwicki & Associates, Idine Restaurant Group Inc., IRS, Mel Buckley, National Bankruptcy Services, Primus Financial Services, Raymond Anderson, Saro Leasing, SBC, Smart & Final Inc., State Board of Equalization, and Young's Market

Additional creditors listed in November filings are Alameda Co. Industries, Alameda Co. Property Tax, AT&T, Ballena Isle Marina, California Linen, Check Center, Cintas Corp., Commercial Trade Bureau, Darling Intl., Gene Lafollette, Joe Pucci and Sons, Lang Newspaper, Swisher Hygiene Franchise Corp., Tevis T. Thompson, Jr. (the trustee in the case up until October 21), The Log, U.S. Trustee, Valley Services, and Valley Yellow Pages. The creditors' meeting is set for January 4, 2005 at the trustee's office, 1301 Clay St., Rm 680N in Oakland.

FALSE REPORT OF PROFIT AS MEAL COST DATA CONCEALED

Caltrans Division of Rail has circulated a variety of false statements in a widely distributed e-mail in response to September's CRN article on food service. Caltrans makes claims that San Joaquin food service is profitable, that June sales results were low because of train annulments, and that TRAC never asked for financial data regarding food. All the while, Caltrans has continued to withhold key financial records.

The e-mail says that in Fiscal Year 2004, "Amtrak will report a profit on San Joaquin food service of about 23%, with revenues of about \$1.7 million and costs of about \$1.4 million." However, omission of labor costs of \$1.1 million and commissary costs of \$0.3 million make the report of profit entirely false. Total loss was about \$1 million.

Caltrans calls use of June sales data unfair because "a huge percentage of our trains were annulled. If fewer people ride the train, fewer people eat the meals."

Chef Mario tray meal sales did decline from 2.9 per train in April, to 2.2 per train in May, and 1.6 per train in June, a drop of nearly half. But ridership dropped only about 9 percent from April to June. Annulments cannot be blamed since other June food sales increased from May by about \$4000, while Chef Mario tray meals declined by \$1600. Generally, food sales are not well correlated with train travel, since food sales have declined three years in sequence, despite ridership growth in two of the years.

Despite attempts by TRAC and two other parties to obtain financial information about the food contract and the basis for the decisions, Caltrans claimed, "Until this article

appeared, we have never been asked by TRAC or anyone else to provide information about what we do or why we do it."

That's news to two TRAC officials who met with Division of Rail managers last year. They say they asked for financial data on Chef Mario entrees in mid-2003 and were promised comparative costs of Chef Mario and Gate Gourmet items, but Caltrans never made good on its promise. The public records act request for financial data regarding Chef Mario cited in the September article was sent to Caltrans August 19, a month before publication of the article.

Says a Caltrans official quoted in the e-mail, "All anyone has to do is ask and if the information exists, we provide it. TRAC is certainly within its rights to make a public records act request, but it seems odd that they would do so when the same information is available to anyone just by asking."

According to the e-mail, the author "has learned, simply by asking, that the cost, for example, of the San Joaquin's new pork loin dish is \$7.24."

On September 17, an e-mail to Caltrans Division of Rail's top two officers asked for "all such pricing and total payments to Chef Mario," the second of four requests. The Division of Rail has not responded.

PHOTO CREDIT

In response to a request for photo credit from RailPAC, the photographer of the original photo of the Caltrans food tasting event in Alameda was Russ Jackson.

San Joaquin Salmon Disappoints

San Joaquin Cafe Review By Alan C. Miller

Californians can avoid the travel stress of Interstate 5 and airports on their north-south trips by taking Amtrak's San Joaquin. The eight-hour trip with the bus ride is hard to bear without some passenger amenities for the long journey. Seasoned San Joaquin travelers either pack a very elaborate picnic or must tolerate the offerings in the cafe car.

So, long-suffering passengers had cause for encouragement when Caltrans announced fall menu changes, promising major improvements in San Joaquin cafe fare. It was with great anticipation that I ordered the Salmon on Penne Pasta. The \$11 price seemed a bit steep, but I told myself it was salmon.

Or was it? The lounge attendant kept reheating the entrée, but he couldn't get it hot enough. When the dish finally arrived, I thought he had given me the wrong entrée; it looked like pasta in tomato sauce. Digging under the surface, I found the salmon.

While the salmon was being microwaved repeatedly, I was enjoying a fresh salad made of attractive mixed greens and cherry tomatoes, served in a wood-toned bowl. Very tasty. Unfortunately, that was the end of any good taste. I had one bite of the salmon and found it was barely warm. I asked the attendant to continue to heat it.

While it was heating some more, I noted the bread item was a slight improvement over the doughy hockey puck in plastic served on my last San Joaquin trip. This new bread item was shaped like a miniature loaf of bread, but also suffered from being sealed in plastic. The taste was passable, but made me miss the fresh biscuits offered on the San Joaquin as recently as last year.

The salmon was back, and was finally hot enough. The parsley on top had given up the



"Where's the Fish!?" Farm-raised Salmon hides under a sea of tomato sauce.

fight with microwaves and lay withered on top. The sauce was like cheap tomato soup and not very appetizing. The penne pasta was burned and dry on the top, though not bad on the bottom.

How was the salmon? Imagine a taste consisting of essence of freezer smell. There was no hint of the sweet high notes of flavor that make salmon, even canned salmon, such a popular fish. The mixed vegetables in the adjacent depression were better only in that they had no taste at all.

To be fair, the attendant informed me he thought some of the other entrées were all right, but he hadn't heard anything good about the salmon, and found this entrée impossible to microwave to an acceptable temperature without overcooking parts of it. The instructions said 1.5 minutes, but he had

to cook it three times that to get it warm.

How does such a badly designed item end up on the menu? And how can Caltrans claim these rail entées are better than airline entrées available from national vendors? According to Caltrans, it spends more than any other state on food research and the new entrées offered were the top picks from the taste test in Alameda last July.

Is all this money and effort in vain? My conclusion from my real-world taste test is that the Caltrans tests do not accurately evaluate food items as they will be served aboard the trains. The commercial kitchen and professional cooking staff at the taste tests present each choice at its best. Yet the passenger is handed a inferior microwaved version of the entrée. Doesn't this selection process constitute bait and switch?