

EAT!

Big city dining in Riverside

By **SALLY FRIEDMAN**
SPECIAL TO THE BCT

The chef: When he was living in Philadelphia, Jack Connor used to cross the Tacony-Palmyra Bridge and head for Riverside, to a little bar where he liked to watch sporting events.

Five years ago, Connor, who had long since become a prominent executive chef at the Resorts Hotel and Casino in Atlantic City, returned to that "little bar," but this time as chef of the fine-dining restaurant that became its big brother at the same location.

Today, Bob Halgas of Moorestown owns and operates a cluster of dining spots on Lafayette Street in Riverside, including Cafe Madison and the more informal Towne Tavern and The Courtyard.

The chef and the businessman made a deal: They would commit themselves to bringing fine dining to Riverside, and the chef would have the opportunity to use the finest, freshest ingredients.

The vibe: Step inside and you're transported to another world. It's sophisticated, it's glamorous, and it's somehow a throwback to the supper clubs of Hollywood movies — with just a touch of industrial chic.

Lighting is spectacular, the ceiling soars, the open kitchen is itself an attraction, a pianist plays dinner music, and tables are dressed in white linen. The bar is as modern as tomorrow, and the staff knows its stuff.

The younger crowd is likely to be seated at the bar, while the more mature diners and families, many who choose to celebrate special occasions here, are likely to be at the tables.

The menu/signature dishes: Starters/appetizers include House Cured Verlasso Salmon, Black Angus Beef Empanadas and Roasted Spring Vegetable Ravioli.

Entrees offer beef lovers such favorites as Pepper Crusted Filet Mignon, Ginger Miso Marinated Butcher Steak and New York Strip Sirloin, among others. The chef's signature beef dish — and the restaurant's most requested — is Smoked Rib Eye with Lobster Mac and Cheese.

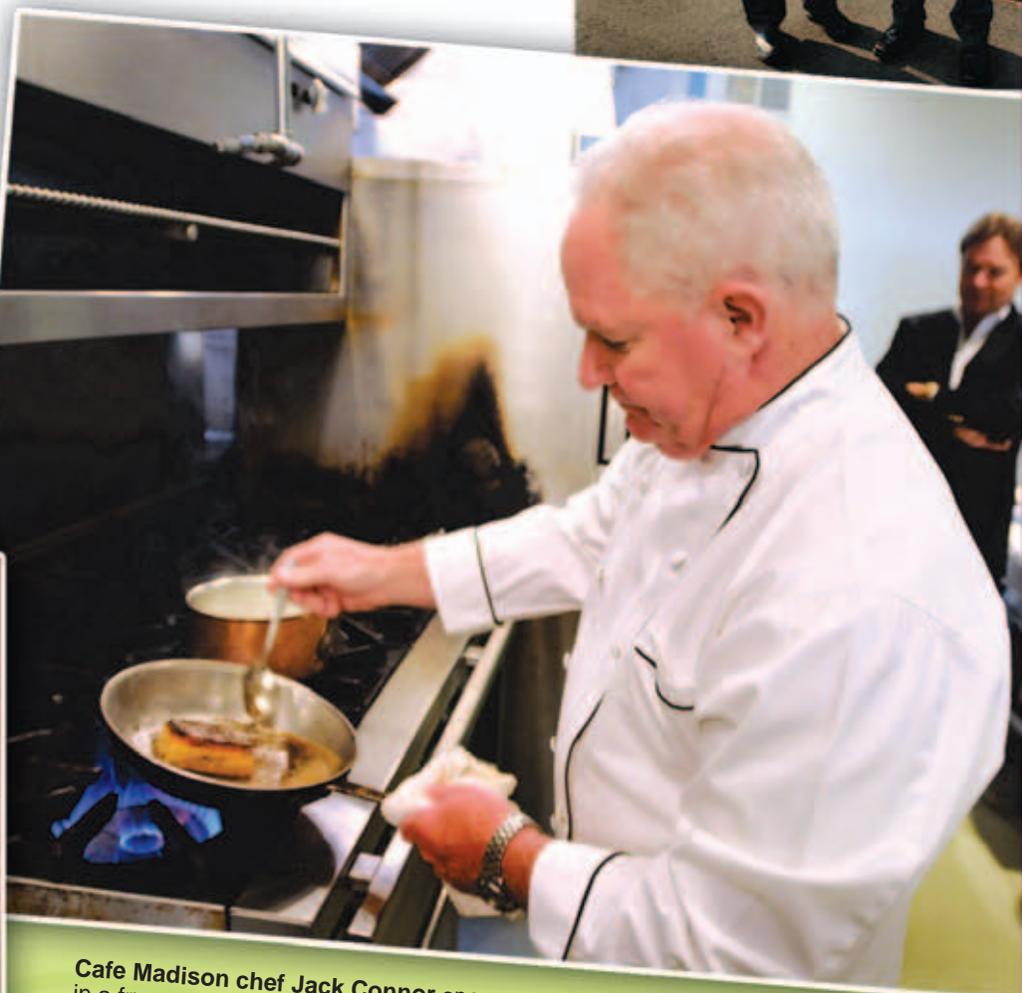
Just desserts: Forget your diet and just go for it. There's a selection of dessert cocktails such as Rice Pudding Martini and Key Lime Martini. A Peanut Butter Stack With Crumbled Brownies and Peanut Butter Mousse is another contender, and so is Bourbon Vanilla Creme Brulee.

If you want to top off your meal with the chef's suggestion, it would be a sinfully rich cheesecake (with some chocolate thrown in). "Most of our desserts are shared at the table — that way, you get the pleasure without all of the calories," Connor said.

Sounds like a plan.

Have a favorite restaurant you'd like to see featured? Send your suggestion to pinegander@aol.com.

Cafe Madison chef Jack Connor (left) and owner Robert Halgas



Cafe Madison chef Jack Connor spoons butter over a piece of salmon cooking in a frypan on the stove at the Riverside restaurant.

JUST THE FACTS:

Where: Cafe Madison, 33 Lafayette St., Riverside, 856-764-4444

Hours: Tuesday-Thursday, 5-10 p.m. (food until 9:30);
Friday and Saturday, 5 p.m.-midnight (food until 11)

Prices: Appetizers average \$12; entrees average \$30

Other: Parking on-site; handicapped-accessible

Photos By
Dennis
Mc Donald

BCT staff photographer



A table near the window at Cafe Madison in Riverside.