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the NOVI NEWS

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Council drops wildlife study out of budget

By JAN JEFFRES
Staff Writer

A proposed ordinance to protect Novi's wildlife was threatened with extinction Wednesday, as nature conservation became the prey of fiscal conservatism.

"It sounds like an Ann Arbor ordinance. They check bunny trails and all that," said Council Member Joseph Toth, who joined the majority in deleting \$12,600 for the research from the planning commission's fiscal year 1991-92 budget draft.

At present, the planning board cannot turn down a site plan if a wildlife habitat could be threatened, commissioner Judy Johnson said.

The proposed study would have contracted with naturalists who would work with city consultants to document Novi's land and aquatic species, as well as develop a system

of "corridors" to enable wildlife to move freely within protected woodlands and wetlands.

This would provide a framework for regulations requiring habitat preservation within developer's site plans.

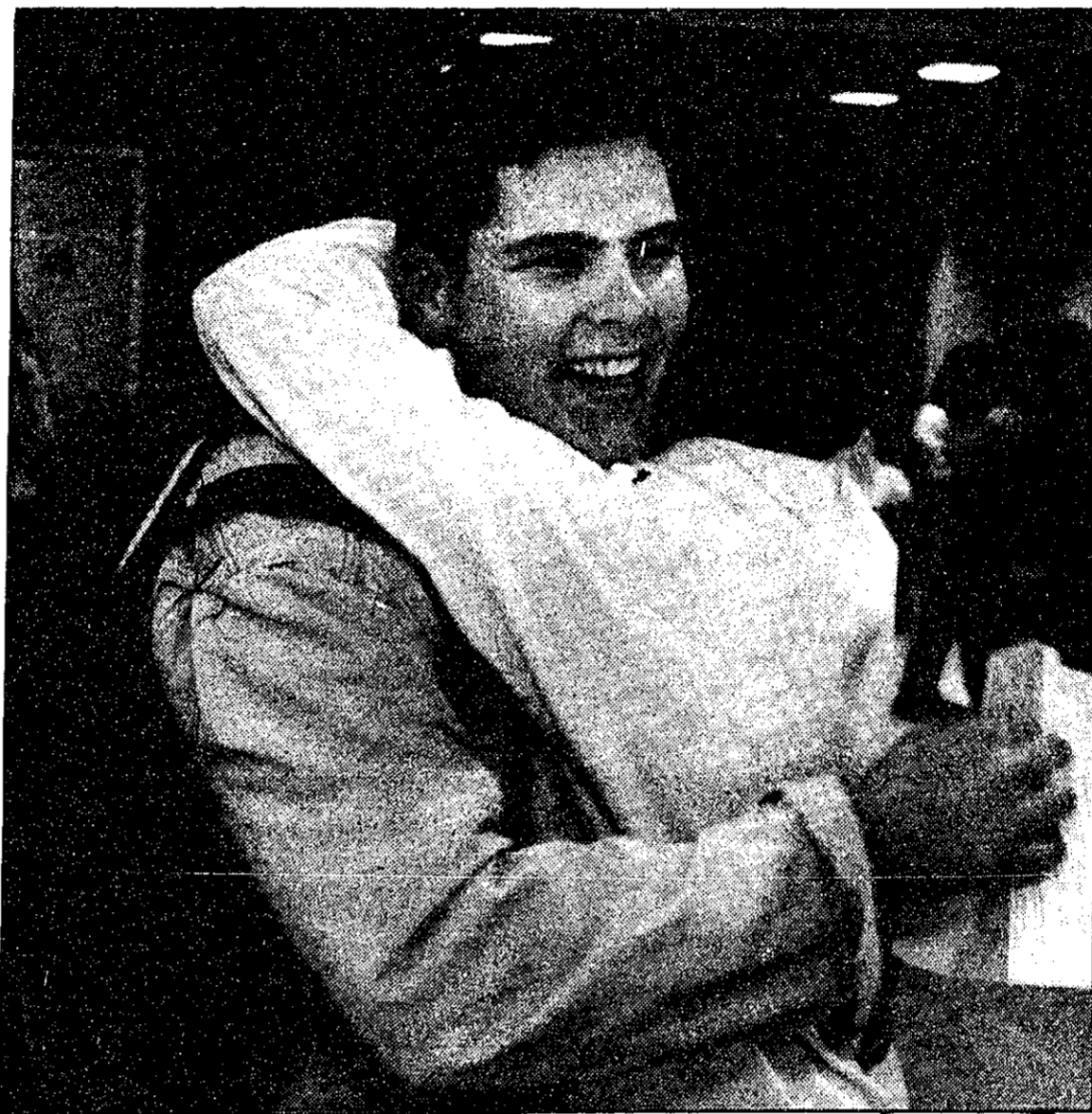
"What we'll do is negotiate the best protection that you can," Johnson said, adding that the city attorney told her such an ordinance could be enforced.

"Perhaps it's leaving a narrow corridor at the back of a development that all the wildlife can move along, at a minimal cost to the developer."

Habitat protection appears to be a priority among city residents, community development director James Wahl said.

"Site plans come in and residents say you'll disturb the habitat. We sit on our hands. We don't know the

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Returning soldier welcomed back home

By CRISTINA FERRIER
Staff Writer

"There he is!" shouted one voice in a crowd of people waiting for Sean Harding, one of Novi's own soldiers coming home from the Persian Gulf.

As Sean walked into the international terminal at Detroit Metropolitan Airport April 9, family members and friends from his Novi High School marching band days greeted him with cheers, hugs and camera flashes. It was his first time home in a year and a half.

Two representatives of Project Sound, a local military support group, were also on hand carrying yellow ribbons.

There were no words to describe the euphoria the Harding family felt at being together again — no time to wax philosophical.

Sean hugged his parents and his sister Karen. He looked shocked at how tall his younger brother Paul had grown. He met his older brother Duncan's girlfriend for the first time. He was home at last.

"It feels great," said Sean. His father, Rev. Leslie Harding, agreed.

"There aren't any words," he

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Sean Harding received a welcome home hug from his mother, Judy Harding, on his arrival at Detroit Metropolitan Airport's international terminal last Tuesday. This is the first trip home in a year-and-a-half for Sean, who was stationed in Saudi Arabia as a part of Operation Desert Storm from September 15 to March 29.

Planning budget targetted for cuts

By JAN JEFFRES
Staff Writer

A quick weight loss approach was taken to the planning commission's proposed fiscal year 1991-92 budget Wednesday, as the Novi City Council went looking for perceived fat.

The commission originally requested a 16-percent increase over its 1990-91 budget of \$180,000.

The budget proposed started at \$208,109, but city Finance Director Les Gibson cut \$58,000 off the top.

This adjustment was augmented by almost \$45,000, as the council pared away an \$18,000 Haggerty Connector study, a \$9,000 industrial study, a \$12,600 habitat plan

and reduced the Town Center Planning committee's budget by \$5,500.

A preliminary wrap-up of the entire Novi budget is scheduled for Wednesday. The city's fiscal year begins July 1, but the budget must be complete by May 20.

Some council members looked at the planners' budget with a jaundiced eye, suggesting that it was too development-oriented. Most of the money would go to planning consultants working contractually with the city.

"I don't think the planning commission should become the developing commission of the city and this is what I read in all these documents. You're trying to bring the development in. We've got a group

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Novi SEV tops the billion mark

By SCOTT DANIEL
Staff Writer

Novi's total tax base has gone over \$1 billion for the first time.

Figures released by the city assessor's office Friday indicate that Novi's tax base stands at \$1,007,604,900 after the March board of review appeal process. A total \$6,641,800 was cut from the city's assessment of \$1,014,246,700 before the board.

The largest decrease in assessments after review hearings came in residential property. Novi Field Appraiser Dave Hieber said nearly \$3.5 million was cut from residential assess-

ments this year from \$546,213,500 to \$542,851,600.

"Residential is typically the largest area of reduction," he said. "We get the most appeals from homeowners."

Revenue from residential areas went up \$59,846,200 from 1990. Hieber said residential parcels in Novi increased from 9,077 in 1990 to 9,981 this year in accounting for the added revenue. On average, assessments went up 4 percent this year for homeowners.

Hieber said the board of review hearings went relatively smoothly this year with homeowners.

"I think it was a little better this year than last," he said. "Most of the residents ask their

questions and do their workups. There was very little shouting."

The city appraiser said many residents were better prepared and more informed about the appeal process this year. He said they stand a better chance of winning the hearing if they present detailed information to the board.

"A lot of them came with sales figures," Hieber said. "The more the people are informed the better off they are."

The second largest post-board alteration came in assessments from commercial areas. A reduction of nearly \$3 million was made after the

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Attorney downplays footings rule trouble

By SCOTT DANIEL
Staff Writer

A proposed zoning ordinance amendment that would allow developers to complete more work before final site plan approval will not likely lead to an increase in abandoned buildings in Novi, according to Assistant City Attorney Dennis Watson.

The zoning ordinance currently

allows the issuance of footing and foundation permits before final site plan approval. With the permits, developers are allowed to lay out footings and construct foundation walls of buildings.

The ordinance amendment would further allow for the construction of "mechanical appurtenances" after separate permits were

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Photo by BRYAN MITCHELL

Play ball

The high school baseball season opener was played Wednesday and Novi High School faced off with Northville High. It was a great start for Novi squad, defeating Northville by a score of 12-2.

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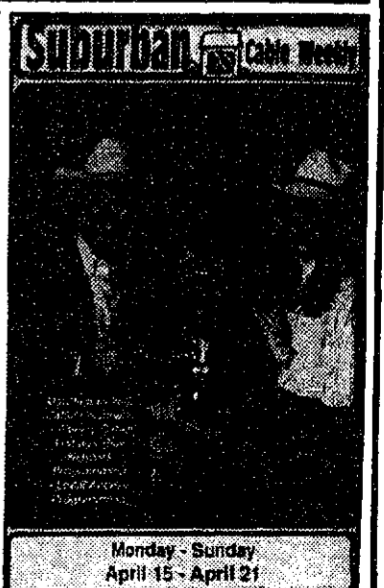
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Planning budget is target of cuts

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of people trying to stop the growth," Council Member Joseph Toth said.

Planning commission chair Edward Kramer and commissioner Judy Johnson appeared to be reeling as the council wielded their budget knives.

"Is that what you're going to do? Does that mean that we are told, you're cutting these things out line-by-line," Johnson asked.

"We are the decision-makers who are responsible to the public," Council Member Nancy Cassis said.

Council Member Hugh Crawford was unconvinced of the value of several of the proposed studies: "You can do all the studies you want. The end result is the developer is going to come to us and try to get what they want."

Council members collectively raised their eyebrows at the Haggerty Connector Sector Study, which would have evaluated land use in the area with input from property owners and Realtors. Design standards for the six-lane boulevard from I-96 north to the Pontiac Trail/Haggerty Road intersection are expected to be announced this year.

Developers are already inquiring into the area bounded by Twelve Mile Road, Haggerty Road, Fourteen Mile Road and Novi Road/Walled Lake.

Much of the land that will be crossed by the connector is now vacant. A major property-owner is developer Neil Sosin.

The planning commission has had pressure to consider commercial and office zoning to replace the existing residential-agricultural category, city planning consultant Brandon Rogers said.

But council members said they didn't want to see strip malls along the connector, which is residential to the east in Farmington Hills.

"We are holding our property to the west of Haggerty as residential. I don't care if somebody comes in with a bushel basket of money, that property should stay residential," Toth said.

The council agreed to ax the Haggerty Connec-

"I don't think the planning commission should become the developing commission of the city and this is what I read in all these documents. You're trying to bring the development in. We've got a group of people trying to stop the growth," said.

Joseph Toth
Council Member

tor study, unless the city attorney advises it might be necessary to defend the existing zoning in any future legal challenges.

"Drive Telegraph through Bloomfield Township and tell me what's there. Residential. Haggerty Road will be a local street after the connector," Council Member Martha Hoyer said.

"Tell Mr. Sosin it's zoned R-A and stays R-A. Clear Message."

Another clear message was that the council did not want to fund an industrial study.

Planning Commission Chair Edward Kramer said that after the failure of the city's industrial relocation program, the Grand Plan, the study would aid in the understanding of Novi's industrial base.

It would have analyzed existing industrial use and zoning, researched changing trends in industrial development and recommended changes to industrial zoning now in the city master plan. A brochure on industrial opportunities would have been made available to developers.

"I would like to set aside the feeling that we have

more industrial land than any other community in Oakland County," Rogers said, adding that a lot of the existing industrial land is pre-empted by wetlands and woodlands.

Planning Commissioner Judy Johnson said Novi needs industrial development to provide an increased tax base and jobs. In addition, the study would determine if any existing industrial land might be sensitive to pollution due to wetlands, she added.

As some council members saw it, this was duplicating studies already in the city's data banks. "A lot of that was cranked out by the Grand Plan; \$5,000 to crank out another report — I can give you the six copies of the reports I have for the Grand Plan," Toth said.

Council Member Tim Pope warned that the state government is already contemplating tax-base sharing, which would recapture taxes from new development and redistribute them, rather than allowing the money to remain in the community.

"It's going to wipe out any increases," Pope said. "It's better to move some of this industry into the central city which already has infrastructure."

Also erased from the ledger was \$12,600 for a wildlife habitat study (see related story).

The Town Center Steering Committee's budget was slashed down. A \$3,000 item for research on the location of a festival site and artwork at the Novi Town Center shopping mall didn't make it past the council.

"This city should absolutely not pay for that," Pope said.

Hoyer agreed, saying that the chief beneficiary would be the mall businesses.

A \$2,500 study of financing methods for a proposed stroll along the Rouge River in downtown Novi was also deleted.

Studies remaining in the planning commission's fiscal year program are a population demographic study, master plan update work and a transportation plan update.

Sports Briefs

PREP SPORTS UPDATE: The Novi boys' track squad opened the '91 season with an impressive 79-66 home win over Northville on April 9. . . . The Wildcat girls' soccer team got off to a slow start, dropping the first two matches of the season by a combined score of 14-1. On April 9, powerful Northville blanked Novi 9-0 and held the 'Cats without a single shot on goal. Cindy Tolstedt scored twice for the winners. Novi then fell to KVC foe Lakeland 5-1 on April 11. Holly Kendra scored a late goal to help the 'Cats avoid another shutout. . . . The Mustang softballers made their debut a successful one by sweeping a doubleheader against Novi on April 9. Northville won game one 2-0 on a three-hitter by ace Karen Treppone, and then edged the 'Cats 7-6 in the nightcap. Game two was stopped after five innings due to darkness. The Mustangs went ahead 6-1 and then held off a late Novi rally. Northville then went 3-0 with a 9-6 victory against Livonia Stevenson on April 11.

Health Notes

Diet energy: If you've ever been on a diet and wished you weren't or felt you needed some magical routine or pill to give you energy, then this seminar is for you. You will hear the facts on the major factors affecting our health and learn motivational techniques. The seminar is to be presented by Arthur Weaver, M.D., head and neck cancer surgeon; Larry Powers, M.D., endocrinologist, food and fitness writer, author and lecturer; and Roy Vartabedian, D.H.Sc., author of "Nutripoints" and former director of the Wellness Program for Aerobics Research Institute of Dallas, Texas.

The seminar is to begin at 3:30 p.m. and will run until 7:45 p.m. at the Metropolitan Adventist Church, 15585 Haggerty Road, Plymouth.

They are also offering cholesterol blood screening on April 14, from 9 a.m. to noon.

A Creative Cooking Without Meat seminar, taught by Ellen Higgins, R.D., and Natalie Weaver, R.N., will be held on Sunday, April 21, from 12:30-8:30 p.m.

To register, call 420-313 (days), 525-2508 (evenings).

H.U.G.S.: Huron Valley Hospital's H.U.G.S. (Help, Understanding, Grief, Support) group will present two programs on perinatal grief during the month of April.

The first program, entitled "A Shattered Dream: An Evening on Perinatal Grief with Sherokee Ilse" will take place Tuesday, April 16, from 7-9 p.m. at Huron Valley Hospital. Admission is free.

The second program, a workshop entitled "A Shattered Dream: Healing Begins with the Caregiver" will take place Wednesday, April 17, from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Lyon Meadows Conference Center in New Hudson. The workshop fee is \$50, which includes materials, lunch and refreshments.

To register for either program, or for further information, contact the nursing office Huron Valley Hospital, 360-3600, Monday through Friday, 9 a.m.—3 p.m.

Expecting parents: The Oakland County Health Division will offer a series of six Expectant Parent Classes beginning on Wednesday, April 24, in the Oakland County Health Division, 27725 Greenfield Road in Southfield.

Classes will be held from 7 to 9 p.m. and will be taught by public health nurses. There is a \$10 charge for attending the series of classes, and you are asked to pre-register as enrollment is limited.

Topics will include maternal physical changes, good nutrition, growth and development of the fetus and the baby, labor and delivery, infant care and parenting.

The Health Division advises that you enroll as early in your pregnancy as possible.

To register by April 19, please call 424-7090.

Wildlife study killed by budget cuts

Continued from Page 1

facts. . . let's really give you expertise and not somebody saying, 'I saw cranes there. It's a crane nesting area,'" he said.

Council member Nancy Cassis had her doubts. "Save the woodlands. Save the wetlands. You'll save the nature," she said, explaining she felt the existing woodlands and wetlands ordinances would preserve wildlife.

The council was reviewing the commission's \$150,000 wish list in a year characterized by a pared-back approach to finances.

In pulling the proposal, however, the commission was encouraged to seek outside grants to fund the study, which might then be returned to the budget in the future. An attorney's opinion on the workability of the ordinance was also requested.

According to budget documents, wildlife areas

are threatened along Napier Road/Grand River Avenue, within Sect. 11 and in the western portion of the city south of Ten Mile.

Among the animals spotted in Novi are fox, deer, racoons and opossum.

As urbanization gobbles up the creatures' territory, a wildlife management plan would preserve a variety of species, well as provide genetic diversity within a species. Fragile ecosystems should be saved, the study's supporters say, but isolated fragments of open woodlands and wetlands are not enough to sustain a healthy animal population.

Woodlands consultant Linda Lemke said a snowy owl nesting site was destroyed by the development of the Chase Farms subdivision along Eight Mile Road. Some of the hedgerow where the owls lived might have been spared, Lemke argued.

Mayor Matthew Quinn, Mayor Pro Tem Edward Letninger and Council Member Tim Pope opposed

deleting this line item from the budget.

"The whole purpose of the whole plan is for humans to find out who is living there now. Nobody sitting here tonight knows that," Quinn said.

"For the people in this city — 32,000 — \$12,000 is a small price to pay to find out who we're sharing this city with."

How can a wildlife ordinance work, wondered Council Member Hugh Crawford.

"What do you do? Save this piece of land because there's a bunny?," he wondered. "Will we tell a developer that he has to replace two rabbits for every rabbit he displaces. I strongly believe habitat should be protected but this is a study that won't be implemented."

Not so, according to Johnson.

"It's an emerging concern in the planning field that development is not allowed to push all animals from urban areas and create the barrenness it then brings to our lives," she said.

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Mondavi chairs nearby WineFest

Every serious wine consumer knows the name Robert Mondavi. His winery, founded 25 years ago in the Napa Valley, is famed worldwide.

For a quarter century, Robert Mondavi has been the unofficial spokesperson for the California wineries, praising their efforts and encouraging an exchange of technological advances between the New World and the tried-and-true methods of European vintners.

Recently, at age 77, Robert Mondavi has turned over control of the Robert Mondavi Winery to his sons Michael and Timothy. The transition will be smooth because Mondavi desires nothing more than the continuation of a family tradition of excellence in the wine business.

Michael, the sales and marketing director, and Tim, the winemaker, will share duties as joint CEOs. "My father has given us the responsibility of running the Robert Mondavi Winery together with a unified vision," Tim Mondavi said, in responding to our question about winery challenges in the 1990s.

"These are big shoes to fill, but I'm not going to fill my father's shoes, I'm going to fill my own."

The Mondavis believe their father will never retire. He will just move on to other ventures related to the Robert Mondavi Winery. Among them will be work on the cultural aspects of wine and arenas for integrating viticultural art, and wine and food dimensions.

"Making good wine is a skill," Tim said. "Premium winemaking is an art. Three factors lend an expression to the art of winemaking: the weather, site and soil, and the people involved. The challenge is using these three factors to their maximum."

Tim believes that California's advantage among the wine regions of the world is that grapes can be grown there more naturally. "Wine should be the true reflection of its natural environment," he maintains. "Wine is not manufactured; it is grown."

Tim described how winegrowing is a passion for him. He referred to winegrowing as the bellwether of winemaking. His greatest challenge since becoming the winemaker in 1974 has been pinot noir production. We personally believe it has been his greatest success.

"We learn something new each vintage," Tim said. "In 1974, I experimented with different fermentation temperatures for pinot noir. In 1976, we retained stems. In 1978, we put the wine to barrel earlier and used newer oak."

"In 1985, we turned the corner. Now, with the release of the 1988 Robert Mondavi Reserve Pinot Noir, people are realizing that our pinots are not flukes. We have attained a consistent, world-class quality."

Now celebrating its 10th year, the Ann Arbor Art Association's WineFest is a celebration of the liquid assets of wine. Festivities begin with a buffet dinner from 6-8 p.m. Saturday, April 20, at the Ypsilanti Radisson Resort. After dinner, Tim Mondavi will be the honorary chairperson of a live wine auction of more than 1,000 bottles in all shapes and sizes donated by some of the area's most astute collectors.

Full case lots as well as rare half bottles and large format presentations are up for bids to support the art association's multiple community endeavors. These range from art instruction offered to underprivileged youngsters to enriching the art expression of senior citizens.

Auction proceedings will be followed by a dessert buffet and dancing. If you have entertained the thought of attending a wine auction, at \$50 per person, here's one not to miss. To make reservations or for more information, contact Marsha Chamberlin by calling the Ann Arbor Art Association at 994-8004.

WINE SELECTION OF THE WEEK

1988 Robert Mondavi Winery Pinot Noir Reserve (\$30) has a full, ripe black-cherry impression in the aroma and on the palate. The integrated oak components are reminiscent of a fine Burgundy. The smooth, silky, velvety finish completes a handsome presentation. You may think this bottling is pricey unless you have recently checked the tag on some 1988 Burgundies.

THE SAUCIER'S APPRENTICE

Oil can make for a healthy sauce base

This is the second in a two-part series on different approaches to healthier sauces.

By MAUREEN CLANCY
Copley News Service

Jean-Georges Vongerichten is part chemist, part magician, part public relations representative and part chef. And he is out to change the way the world thinks about sauce.

"I want to make a statement," said the dynamic 33-year-old chef of Lafayette restaurant. "The public thinks that French food is all butter and cream and that you have to sit for two hours at the table to eat it. I want to break that image."

Vongerichten's "laboratory" is a gleaming stainless-steel kitchen with a huge window allowing the public to watch. Lined up on the windowsill in tall, slender glasses is a rainbow of infused oils, his favorite "sauces."

"About five years ago, I threw all my stocks away and moved to pan juices and then to oils; now we do about 30 oils," says the supremely confident chef, offering tastes of a striking red potion flavored with paprika, a brilliant orange oil scented with curry and a crystal-clear mint oil the color of a block of ice. Each oil has a pure, intense flavor and aroma.

"Any ground spice can be made into a flavored oil; herbs, roots, shellfish, fruits and vegetable juices too," says Vongerichten, shaking a jar of lobster oil he has taken from the walk-in refrigerator.

The process starts with mild canola oil, which has the lowest saturated fat content of all vegetable oils. Using several techniques, Vongerichten extracts the essential flavors of saffron, wasabi, ginger, horseradish, cumin, basil, cranberries, shrimp, tomatoes, truffles and other ingredients, then infuses these flavors into the oil.

Ground spices are the easiest to work with, he says. "You just mix the spice powder with water to wake up the flavors; then make a paste the consistency of ketchup; then add the oil and shake. The mixture will be cloudy, but after two days the paste goes to the bottom and you can ladle the oil into a jar."

The solids are then discarded, and the oil can be further strained through cheesecloth or paper coffee filters for greater clarity. Vongerichten says spice oils can be kept at room temperature for a month or more.

For fresh herb oil, such herbs as basil, chervil and mint are blanched in boiling water for 15 seconds, drained, dried and blended with a small amount of olive oil to a smooth paste. The mixture is placed in a glass jar, more olive oil is added and the enhanced oil is allowed to sit for one day before being filtered. Herb oils can be stored, tightly covered, in the refrigerator for up to a week.

Vegetable juice oils are made by combining freshly extracted juices (using a juicer) with safflower or corn oil. They can be used immediately and may be refrigerated for up to two weeks.

But dreaming up these elixirs is only part of Vongerichten's magic. The next step is using them in place of the heavy cream creations of Escoffier and his followers.

"You can drizzle these oils over sauteed or steamed foods, or marinate meat or fish in them a day ahead and grill it," says Vongerichten. Because of the oil's intense flavor, only a few drops are needed. The result is a light, aromatic dish with few calories.

In his book "Simple Cuisine," the chef also suggests using infused oils to dress salads, saute foods and make "absolutely unheard-of mayonnaises." Some of Vongerichten's favorite dishes with huiles parfumes (perfumed oils) are grilled lamb with curry oil, chicken finished with tomato-chill oil and sauteed cod with fresh ginger oil.

Vongerichten says his flavored oils are just what the diner of the '90s ordered: increased flavor with less saturated fat and fewer calories. "And besides," adds the smiling chef, "it's a lot of fun."

TIPS FOR OILS

- Vongerichten offers these suggestions for using infused oils to enliven everyday fare:
- Marinate a butterflied leg of lamb or lamb chops in curry oil, then grill or broil.
- Marinate tuna steaks in wasabi oil before grilling.
- Toss your favorite pasta with citrus-flavored oil.
- Drizzle slices of roast pork loin with cranberry-orange oil.
- Marinate chicken breasts in cardamom oil for 15 minutes; grill or saute.
- Flavor grain salads such as couscous

until pureed. For cranberries, process until ground fine.

Transfer processed vegetable or fruit pulp of choice to large sieve lined with double thickness of cheesecloth. Squeeze processed vegetable or fruit pulp to release about 1 cup of liquid; discard solids.

Transfer juice to medium non-reactive saucepan. Bring to boil and simmer until reduced to ¼ cup, 25 to 30 minutes. Strain this syrup through fine sieve; discard solids. Pour syrup into jar with tight-fitting lid.

Add oil; cover jar tightly and shake vigorously. Store in refrigerator for up to two weeks. For oil with uniform color, shake well before using.

CITRUS-INFUSED OIL

- 2 tablespoons citrus zest (orange, lemon, grapefruit)
- 1 cup canola, grapeseed, safflower or corn oil
- Yields one cup.

Combine zest of choice and oil in glass bottle with tight-fitting lid. Let stand at room temperature for two days to allow flavors from zest to infuse oil. Strain mixture through paper coffee filter. Discard zest and return oil to bottle. Store, tightly covered, in refrigerator for up to six months.

RED SNAPPER IN POTATO FLAKES WITH TOMATO OIL

- 3 eggs
- 4 7-ounce red snapper fillets
- 1 cup instant potato flakes
- ½ cup extra virgin olive oil
- salt and freshly ground pepper to taste
- tomato oil [recipe follows]
- Yields four servings.

Beat eggs in shallow bowl. Dip red snapper fillets in beaten egg, then dredge them lightly in potato flakes. Pat flakes onto fish so fillets are nicely coated.

In saute pan, heat olive oil over medium-high heat. Cook fillets one minute per side. Season with salt and pepper. Transfer fillets to warmed serving plates. Drizzle with tomato oil.

TOMATO OIL

- 4 large beefsteak or plum tomatoes
- ¼ cup extra virgin olive oil
- 1 tablespoon chopped thyme or basil
- Yields ¼ cup.

Put tomatoes, unpeeled, through juicer extractor. You should have 3 cups of juice. In saucepan over medium-high heat, reduce tomato juice by ½ to about 1 cup. Strain through fine mesh strainer into clean saucepan. Reduce to syrup, no more than ¼ cup. Stir in olive oil and thyme or basil. Store, tightly covered, in refrigerator for up to two weeks.

Chef Mary Brady

Cooking in the 'wave can draw raves

Ten years ago I never would have thought of buying a microwave for my home or business. I still rarely use a "micro" mostly due to lack of habit.

But, because convenience foods are so popular today and time is so short for cooking, the microwave is becoming a best friend to one-time cooks and future culinarians. I have nothing against the microwave; my complaint is much of fast food that goes into them.

The micro can be a valuable tool for nutritional, quick meals. According to a spokesman for a large manufacturer, 70 percent of the time microwaves are used to reheat precooked foods, 20 percent for defrosting, and only 10 percent for primary cooking functions.

It is important for nutrition's sake to use the microwave for these primary functions. Steamed vegetables are incredible, fish excellent and snacks easy. Although I do not advocate cooking meat or poultry in the microwave, mostly due to personal preference, there are many other options.

Oatmeal and Cream of Wheat are easy, fast and there is little clean-up. Reheating

soups saves pans and time. I portion leftover soup and chill into mugs and everyone helps themselves when hungry.

Eggs are simple and quick in the microwave. When bacon is "fried" in the micro much of the fat is melted away leaving a much leaner product. Melting butter becomes a piece of cake and defrosting liquids easy as setting a dial.

The principal behind microwave cooking is fairly simple, yet very different from conventional oven cooking. Convection ovens, or the ovens we are used to, use heated air for an extended length of time to cook food, the air itself transfers heat.

The air inside a microwave only becomes heated as the food that is being cooked becomes hot. The waves, generated by the oven's magnetron tube, travel through the food at a rate of 2.5 billion times per second. This sets the molecules present in the food in motion, causing heat-producing friction. This may sound very scientific, and it is, but simply put, the waves penetrate the food at an incredibly high speed and cause the water molecules of the food to move around fast and pro-

duce friction, which produces heat and cooking.

The actual microwaves rarely pass more than 1 ½ inches into the food; the outer areas heat first and residual heat moves toward the center of the food heating it. The metal walls reflect the waves and do not become hot. Plates become hot from the food, not from the microwaves. If there is no moisture the microwave cannot produce the friction necessary to heat.

Because of the direct heat transfer foods heat quicker than other cookery methods. This offers some drawbacks. Flavor is a chemical process that requires time and temperature to fully develop, neither of which is prominent with microwave cooking.

In addition, standard microwave ovens do not brown foods. This is unappealing to most people. We eat with our eyes. If it looks good it will taste good. Foods with high contents of fat, water and sugar tend to burn easily because they heat so quickly. Cook halfway and stir to prevent

burning.

A microwave is much more efficient full than almost empty. For warming or cooking, food should be no colder than refrigerator temperature. Put frozen food through a defrost cycle first. When arranging a meal on a plate put the denser foods on the outer rim and the less dense, such as vegetables in the middle. Keep your oven clean for the most efficient use.

Glass, Saran Wrap, some plastics, and paper (for short cooking times) are acceptable cooking vessels. Foil and metal skewers can be used effectively but check your manufacturer's guidelines before doing so. Like any other method of cooking practice makes perfect.

The microwave is an indispensable piece of equipment in many households but it is important to remember that speed can't be a substitute for good ingredients and nutritious meals.

Mary Brady is a certified executive chef and a resident of Northville.

PARCHMENT SEAFOOD SPECTACULAR

- 2 6- to 8-ounce halibut steaks
- 1 tablespoon dry white wine
- dash soy sauce
- dash lemon juice
- ¼ cup sliced mushrooms
- ¼ cup small broccolt florets
- 1 tablespoon tarragon (fresh if available)
- dijon mustard
- salt and pepper to taste

Lay 2 sheets parchment, large enough to wrap envelope-style around fish and vegetables, on the counter. Place a fish steak in the middle of each and spread lightly with dijon mustard. Add vegetables and sprinkle with wine, soy, lemon juice and tarragon. Add salt and pepper as desired. Wrap completely. Place on glass dish and microwave on high 7-9 minutes. Let rest several minutes. Serve in paper. Potatoes, rice or pasta that have already been cooked can be added to packet for a complete meal.

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