

# A gourmet education begins at Two Tails

May 16 saw the introduction of what should become an entertaining and educational monthly event – Saturday night gourmet cooking classes at Two Tails Market/Eatery at 2400 Lake Shore Drive in Woodstock.

The class began with restaurant manager Don O'Connor introducing our instructor for the evening, Chef Eric Miller, who promptly gave the participants a brief but enlightening lesson in seafood selection. Shrimp and scallops, he explained, are sorted and sold by the number of items per pound. If the shrimp label says "16-20 count" it means that 16 to 20 shrimps of this size will give you one pound of shrimp. He then reviewed with us the variety of fish and seafood available in the frozen foods case at Two Tails.

These days, he taught us, frozen fish is actually fresher than "fresh." The processing of the catch happens right on the ship. The fish are hauled from the sea, cleaned and prepared for freezing immediately and flash frozen within minutes of coming out of the water. Being frozen, it loses none of its flavor in the shipping. Fresh fish, on the other hand, has to travel for a while to get to the Midwest – and we are, after all, a thousand miles from the nearest ocean. Eric then took us to the lobster case.

"A lot of people," he said, "want the biggest lobster they can get. They're making a mistake." Big lobsters, he explained, are big because they are old, and in lobsters, older means tougher and less flavorful. The best lobster tails come from lobsters less than 1 year old.

This being a class, we then took a test. Eric brought out a tray with 24



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## OUT ON THE TOWN

John Daab

numbered plastic cups, each cup holding a different cooking ingredient. We were to pass the cups around, inspect them however we saw fit, and identify the ingredients. Most of us recognized a few right away and guessed, with varying degrees of success, at the rest. He did not, thank goodness, grade the results.

Then came the part of the class that most of us, I think, had been waiting for. We got to play in a real restaurant kitchen.

"Eric lined us up in front of cutting boards on one side of a food preparation island. He stood on the other side of the island, where we could all see him, to demonstrate the efficient and safe use of what may be the most versatile of food preparation tools, the French chef's knife. He held up two knives.

"This knife," he said, showing us a masterpiece with a forged blade and a polished black handle secured by polished brass rivets, "costs \$180. This one," he said, showing us a knife with a machine-stamped blade and an electric blue molded-on plastic handle, "costs \$6. They are both good knives. I prefer the \$6 knife because it fits my hand better." It was the last we saw of the



Courtesy photo

masterpiece.

Eric then showed us how to cut the vegetables for a mirepoix, the vegetable combination of onions, carrots and celery that is, in French cooking, as Eric puts it, "the basis of everything." For this evening, though, the mirepoix would be the basis of the featured dish of the lesson, pan-fried crab cakes. They were delicious.

Chef Eric Miller conducts a cooking class at Two Tails Market/Eatery. For information about upcoming classes, or to reserve a place in a class, call Two Tails Market/Eatery at 815-337-4028.

Two Tails Market/Eatery will continue to offer the cooking classes at 7 p.m. the third Saturday of each month. Bring an 8- to 10-inch chef's knife, if you have one, and your appetite. For information or to reserve a place for an upcoming class, call Two Tails Market/Eatery at 815-337-4028.

John Daab lives in Woodstock.