

NM OATH

Luke West

To open at Ken Berry's Swiss Chalet Grill



BY DR. SUSAN TRAVIS
COLUMNIST FOR VAMONOS!

It's been a year since the Swiss Grill's first dinner guests relaxed into fine conversation, music, and some of the finest dining to be found locally.

The word is out, the food is hot, and the music is definitely ringing out across the piney hills over Ruidoso.

Overlooking the verdant valleys above Ruidoso, the main dining

area of the Swiss Grill features paneled, paned windows and a cozy open deck lined with tiny lights which, for now, twinkle as a backdrop for the Grill's most recent local performer, Luke West, presented through the NM-OATH Performing Arts Initiative.

The generous spirit of Ken Berry in offering the Swiss Grill as a venue for such presentations has its roots in his own professional journey. In the cozy bar behind the foyer of the Swiss Chalet, low lights wink harmoniously with a warm crackling fire as Ken Berry pours a glass of wine. "Let me tell you a story," he says somberly, then his face breaks into a grin that will fill your heart.

His tale begins with a long ago friend named Caballero, whose culinary school launched an unexpected journey for Berry. Sparking a love for fine cuisine, Berry's culinary talents over the years have taken him from the Grand Canyon's Bright Angel Lodge to local restaurants such as Kokopelli, Cattle Baron, Pasta Café, Alto Lakes Golf & Country Club, and La Fondue.

Today, Berry seems to have found his niche as general manager of the Swiss Grill or "The Swiss," as the regulars have come to know it. David "Stony" Stone, his chef, peeks around the door to nod a bright hello, then retreats to the kitchen to prepare menu items from Berry's eclectic compilation.

The flavors are an exotic cultural blend from among the best of dining Berry has experienced throughout his travels. His signature Peppered Ahi Tuna Steak was once a feature at the "Eyes on the World" restaurant at the World Trade Center. He's refined other recipes from Las Vegas and other locales.

At Swiss Grill, there's something for everyone, from burgers, dogs, tenders, and pizzas, to more sophisticated offerings such as Fondue Bourguignonne, Salt Encrusted Ribeye, and Chimichuri Flat Iron Steak.

In between the telling of his tale, Berry greets new customers and assesses his new pickle relish with a strong thumbs up. Many know him as a treasured community supporter and friend to many causes, among them NM-OATH, and COPE, for whom he will host a benefit on April 13.

"Restaurateurs and merchants have an obligation to engage in the concerns and issues of the community, for we are the face shown to our visitors. They take away the memories of their encounters and experiences, and our presentation is how they remember and describe our community." At the Swiss Grill, conversation often flows between tables and guests often rise to shake hands and introduce themselves.

Berry laments that there is less live entertainment in Ruidoso since the '50s. He does his part to increase the entertainment offerings—on Fridays and Saturdays, Berry uses his own beautiful voice in what he calls the "loungy" genre, characterized by crooners like Tony Bennett, Frank Sinatra, and others. "It's all about nostalgia," he says, "I'm not trying to be original, I just want to help others remember these legends."

Now Berry has opened his doors and his heart to NM-OATH, an organization seeking not only to enhance local entertainment, but more importantly, raise awareness for victims of human trafficking both locally and afar. In the end, it's about uniting in the pursuit of a strong healthy community, not only vigilant, but vibrant both in culture and in spirit.

ACTION STEP: Dine at the Swiss Grill any time, but mark your calendars for the second and fourth Thursdays when NM-OATH will present Luke West from 7:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.

Dr. Susan Travis is executive director of New Mexico Organized Against Trafficking Humans. Report suspected human trafficking activity at 575-630-0015 or 1-888-3232-888. For more info on advocacy projects, E-mail Travis at: healthyworld@nm-oath.org. Current news and programming information can be found at www.nm-oath.org where donations can be made online.

PLEASE NOTE: Luke will perform
Jan. 19, Thursday, 6-8 p.m. at Sacred Grounds
Jan. 26, Thursday, 7-9 p.m. at Swiss Chalet Grill



A friendly and familiar face known to many in Ruidoso—Ken Berry at Swiss Chalet's Grill.



Spectacular view of rolling hills from the balcony at Swiss Chalet Grill.