

Saturday benefit to be food a la White House

Chef who served five presidents will headline event for East Meck and Museum of History.

By DAVID PERLMUTT

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He grew up poor in a French house with no electricity and would spend 25 years in America's most powerful house.

Until 2004, Roland Mesnier was executive White House pastry chef, serving five presidents and first families.

His intricate desserts were devoured by world leaders.

In his charge, no dessert was ever repeated at state dinners. No dish reached a table without him tasting it, and no mousse cake, scoop of ice cream, tart or pie was served that wasn't from his kitchen.

On Saturday, as Americans prepare to elect a new occupant of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, Mesnier will be at the Charlotte Museum of History to direct a black-tie dinner fit for a president - or king or prime minister.

The event will raise money for the museum and East Mecklenburg High's All-Star Teacher Initiative, a program designed to recruit and keep quality teachers.

He'll oversee a four-course meal that follows strict White House protocol. East Meck's culinary students will help. They'll set tables with dinner china designed for Woodrow Wilson's White House.

On Friday, Mesnier will lecture CMS high school culinary students on the rigors of being a world-renowned chef.

"I truly want the students helping with the dinner to know what it's like to be working in the White House," Mesnier said. "I want them to be shaking in their boots, just like I was when I started there. Perfection is no accident."

Apprentice at \$1 a month

Perfection took Mesnier years of long days.

He was raised with eight siblings in Bonnaux, France, a village of 140. As a boy, food was short and he'd spend days in the pastry shop run by his brother Jean. "He gave me the taste of doing pastry," he said.

At 14, Mesnier began a three-year pastry apprenticeship. He earned \$1 a month, mostly scrubbing floors and washing pots the first year. One day, the chef showed him how to make a croissant. "You never forget when you make your first croissant," he said.

Passing his apprenticeship, he began hopping around the globe, always looking to ex-



PHOTO COURTESY OF ROLAND MESNIER

Pastry chef Roland Mesnier retired from the White House in 2004 after serving Carter, Reagan, Clinton and two Bushes.

and his skills. He worked in Paris, Germany and the famed Savoy Hotel in London.

In 1976, he moved to The Homestead resort in Virginia. Three years later, after creating more than 550 desserts, he heard first lady Rosalynn Carter was looking for a pastry chef. He applied, and Carter offered him the job.

"It's a shock today that I got the job," he said. "I'm still not sure it happened."

Reagan chocolate on the sly

His White House stories are many.

The Carters only had desserts when guests were in the White House - otherwise they ate fresh fruit.

Ronald Reagan loved chocolate anything, but wife Nancy wouldn't let him eat it. "When she was out of town, I always made him a big bowl of chocolate mousse," he said.

Bill Clinton was allergic to chocolate, dairy products and flour. Yet, he loved fruit pies.

Mesnier would research powerful White House guests to create tailor-made desserts.

For the president of Mexico, he made a dessert shaped like a cactus. For Kenya's leader, he created a giraffe. He made chocolate coaches for the queen of England.

For his Charlotte guests Sat-

Some do's, don'ts at the White House

- No bread and butter served at state dinners. "They don't want crumbs to get on guests," said former chief White House pastry chef Roland Mesnier.
- No strong spices can be used in food. "No garlic," Mesnier said. "They don't want the guests to have bad breath at dinner."
- Flower arrangements can't block the view of guests across the table.

urday, he'll serve a new creation.

"It will be like they stepped into the dining room of the White House," he said. "Right down to the famous White House chocolate mint candies wrapped in gold paper."

Want to go?

Tickets are still available for the "Dinner at the White House" fundraiser. For more information and ticket prices, call Christy Williams at the Charlotte Museum of History at 704-568-1774.

Experts: Hard Rock must hard s

The struggling \$400 million theme park needs more marketing, say local experts.

(Myrtle Beach) Sun News

MYRTLE BEACH — Hard Rock Park needs to go on a \$10 million to \$40 million advertising spree if it wants a chance at making its second season successful, local marketing experts said.

It is unclear whether the shuttered \$400 million theme park, which filed for bankruptcy in September after being open for six months, will be able to raise those types of funds. The park did not respond to repeated requests for comment.

In court papers, the park said its inability "to engage in effective out-of-market advertising was particularly devastating" and, along with general economic malaise, was why the park failed. Now, the park plans to "develop a marketing campaign that will position them properly for the reopening" in 2009.

Local marketing and business experts say they repeatedly warned the park before its opening about what, in their view, would be a fatal strategic error.

"It's a classic example of having a good product and not spending the money to market it," said Chad Prosser, director of the S.C. Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism. "We've seen the results."

Local businesses said they had a stake in the success of the park, which was touted as the largest-ever investment in the state's tourism industry. If the park brought in the 3 million visitors a year it projected, it would benefit surrounding hotels, restaurants and stores and raise the overall profile of Myrtle Beach.

Now, the park is reorganizing under Chapter 11,

which holds creditors at bay and buys time for businesses to sort out financial problems. A Delaware bankruptcy court judge has allowed the park to borrow an additional \$1 million, while an additional million could be approved at a hearing Wednesday. The park has until Oct. 31 to explain to the court how it plans to reorganize.

But the bank that holds most of the park's debt, Deutsche Bank Trust Company Americas, has slammed the park's plans for the future, threatening to force the park into Chapter 7 bankruptcy if it does not put itself up for sale.

In court papers filed last week, the bank criticized the park for asking for permission to hire eight law firms and an accounting firm, call-

ing the move "blatant and excessive," considering is no realistic prospect of successful reorganizing.

Though the park retreated on the specific marketing efforts, experts say the park printed on billboards, logos and spotty ads, such as Charles the majority of it seemed to come in and around the park's opening.

"I think they came launched fairly strong then they faded fairly," said Bruce Murdén, a Charleste Rawle Murdy Advertising and Public Relations end of the day, "I'm not sure it was about how money they spent: they spent the morning."

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