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THE FOODIE FUTURE

HALIFAX HAS COME A LONG WAY. AT ONE time, if you wanted something quick and local, your options were fish and chips and donairs. The only international dishes were Chinese and pizza. But now the variety of tastes at different price points makes the restaurant scene finer and more diverse than its population base would suggest.

But it can always get better. We wondered, is there a hole in the local scene, are there delicacies that aren't available, a good idea that hasn't been tried? Or, if it has been tried, could it be done more successfully?

"I'm kinda doing it," says Mark Giffen, owner of Coastal Café (2713 Robie Street, 405-4022). His café is regularly full of north end denizens looking for meals of a higher quality than the average diner menu. "I saw a need and I filled it. Just good food done well. I'm not trying to change the world with earthshaking creativeness, but give people something they recognize and put some quality and time to it."

Giffen does have an idea where the local scene could improve. "One thing that I really miss is a good place for noodles. We had an attempt at it [in the city] but it was a bad spot and bad food." Giffen even says he might like to try doing it himself. "A good French bistro might be nice, but again, that's been tried on Spring Garden but that location might be death. Some locations are just cursed."

Unni Simensen of the Scanway group does catering and pastries (6088 Quinpool, 425-6806) as well as running the Cheapside Café at the AGNS and Saeger Bistro on Spring Garden.

"I would probably open a really nice tea room and a dessert restaurant," she says. "Something a little bit old-fashioned,

that's what people come to Halifax for. I've thought about it for years."

The owner of gourmet pizza joint Morris East (5212 Morris, 444-7663) is Jennie Dobbs, someone who made her dream of running a successful restaurant a reality through new ideas (fresh, local ingredients, a regularly changing menu) and a force of will. If she couldn't do pizza, what would she do?

"I think that Halifax is missing other niche restaurants that offer a high quality product," she says. "Potentially we might need a gourmet burger restaurant. You could source the meat locally and do tons of great ideas, gourmet lamb burgers or really high quality sirloin chuck burgers."

"I think Halifax needs a fish and chips shop. Where you could go and have fish that was caught that morning, dipped in batter and with organic potatoes, wrapped in newspapers."

Jane Wright knows the scene as well as anyone and has seen it grow over the years—her Jane's on the Common (2394 Robie, 431-5683) is considered one of the best around. At first she was a little stumped at the question of what we might be missing and suggested we call Jennie Dobbs for her "vision and ideas." Which we had already.

"Every time I go out, I have a really hard time deciding where to go," admits Wright. "There are so many factors. Some places you can get a good meal but you don't have the ambiance. It's that combination of food and ambiance and service. To get them all in synch is the thing that makes a place magic. That's what I set out to create, a place to have a comfortable meal at an affordable price." —*Carsten Knox*