

Iron Chef Louie's movable feast

By Will Kilburn

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It's 8 o'clock on a recent Thursday night at Tonic, a nightclub on Comm. Ave., where several hundred people have assembled for a regular, mobile gathering known as Iron Chef Night.

"We started doing this on a whim, just getting sick of bars, sick of the scene. We wanted to have our friends over for what we were calling 'pasta night on Thursdays,'" says Iron Chef Louie, also known as Louis DiBiccari, the mild-mannered sous-chef at Sel de la Terre in the Financial District.

"Our friends got hooked on it, and they kind of relied on it every Thursday. They started asking us, 'Can we bring a friend?' 'Sure, you can bring a friend.' And then their friends would say, 'Can we bring a friend?' And before I knew it, we were throwing 40 or 50 people out of a Brookline apartment."

Eventually those gatherings, which began in the cold February of 2003 as a simple house party, were attracting over 100 guests as well as the unwanted attention of local police, so this past winter Louie and the 10 friends known as "the players" decided to take their party to bars and clubs around town, where \$10 buys "cheffers" a plate of good food and a drink.

What the food will be is unknown to the cheffers until they're served, and even the ingredients are largely a mystery to Louie until the morning of each event: Borrowing somewhat from the "Iron Chef" TV show, the menu is set by the guests, who go to the Iron Chef Louie website and vote from a fairly long list of possibilities. Louie and his kitchen cohorts are only told the results—in this case, chicken, goat cheese, oranges, and sage—as they drive over to a wholesale food market in Chelsea, where they buy what they need and then spend the rest of the day



GLOBE PHOTO/SARAH BREZINSKY

Iron Chef Louie, also known as Louis DiBiccari, addresses the crowd at Tonic before dinner at Iron Chef Night last month.

in a prepping-and-cooking frenzy.

The original idea behind Iron Chef Night, though, is creating a friendly atmosphere in a town that is often anything but.

"Boston is one of the colder cities at times about going out and meeting people. People can tend to be very cliquy here," says Kevin Vonasek, ICL's director of business development. "Iron Chef Louie gave us an opportunity to go out and meet people. Guys, girls, doesn't matter — we'd go out and start talking to people in bars and say, hey, you should check out this party we're doing."

Out on the floor, the party they're doing is going quite well.

"I like to drink, I like to eat, and I like girls, so it all makes sense," says singer and veteran cheffer Skip Jennings, 32, pointing out an interesting demographic quirk of Iron Chef Nights: Most of the crowd, for some reason, is female. "They come out because they know the guys here are upwardly mobile, pretty hip guys, not a bunch of 21-year-olds in baseball hats. In Boston, there are so few clubs where you can go if you're my age and actually dance and have a good time and not have a bunch of 22-year-olds underfoot."

Whatever the reason, the ratio, which approaches 3 to 1, is viewed less than favorably by some in the

majority.

"Horrible!" says Alyson Fay of Brighton. "Horrible for us, awesome for them."

But despite that imbalance, both Fay and friend Erica Servello have kept Iron Chef on their calendar since they started coming to the house parties last year.

"It's a place you can go on Thursday nights where you know a bunch of people there, you know you're gonna have a good time," says Servello. "Everyone comes up to you and says, 'Oh, how do you know Louie?' 'Well, I've got a friend that blah-blah-blah, that blah-blah-blah.' It's always a friend of a friend of a friend, so you're always only three times removed from whoever you're talking to."

"The bottom line is that he's a great guy, he makes awesome food, and he throws awesome parties," concludes Fay. "No matter if he's cooking for 15 people or 300, Louie always makes the most incredible food I've ever had."

The next Iron Chef Night is Thursday at Ned Devine's at Faneuil Hall. For more information or to vote on the ingredients, go to www.ironcheflouie.com.

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