

Bargain Dining

* Pho Xe Lua

1021 West Argyle Street; 773-275-7512.

VIETNAMESE

The tricky menu takes a bit of getting used to, but what's your hurry? Explore the delicate spring rolls with shrimp or pork (\$3.50) or the banh hoi bo nuong tom, a fine bowlful of rice vermicelli with beef and shrimp (\$8.95). Lavish fresh greens show up everywhere—most successfully in the tender beef with lemon (bo tai chanh; \$10.95). And, of course, there are soups: a surefire choice is the giant serving of canh rau cai dau hu, vegetable soup with tofu (\$8.95). For dessert, or just for fun, try the bubble tea (\$3.50). **-J.T.**

* Sweet Baby Ray's

249 East Irving Park Road, Wood Dale; 630-238-8261. **BARBECUE**

You'll need the paper towel roll on your table at this new barbecue joint. A descendant—and user—of the popular eponymous sauce that started on Chicago's West Side, this dine-in or takeout counter-service spot is putting out some mighty fine 'cue. The baby back ribs (\$16.99) and spareribs (\$15.99) are both smoked on premises, and both are scrumptious, chewy-tender to perfection. And there's righteous pulled pork (\$9.99 a pound), smoked chicken (whole \$9.99), and gumbo (\$3.99). Now pass me those wet wipes. **-D.R.W.**

* Mysore Woodlands

2548 West Devon Avenue; 773-338-8160. **INDIAN**

You don't go to Mysore for the ambiance—there isn't any in the harshly lit large dining room. Go for authoritative South Indian vegetarian food, beginning with dahi

>> Ras Dasha's injera bread pudding with berries and vanilla ice cream (see page 108)



vada, fried puréed lentil balls accompanied by yogurt dip (\$4.50). Then head to the uthappam (\$6.99), a pancake of fermented lentil and rice flour filled with onions and peas. Don't miss the Royal Family dosai (\$11.95), a folded crispy rice crêpe the size of a maharajah's robe stuffed with spiced onions, potatoes, peas, and carrots. The Madras payasam (\$3.50) of vermicelli cooked in milk and honey and garnished with raisins and cashews will temper the spices, as will a mango lassi at this BYO. (Also in Westmont: 6020 South Cass Avenue, 630-769-9663.) **-D.R.W.**

* Reflections

38564 North Edgewood Street, Lake Villa; 847-265-4170. **POLISH**

Out on the shores of Deep Lake, an old resort has been converted into a charming wood-clad Polish supper club. An Okocim beer at hand, I finished off the barley-sausage kiszka patties with sauerkraut appetizer (\$4.95) and then dug into an awesome

platter of golabki (stuffed cabbage), pierogi scattered with chopped bacon, and Polish sausage with sauerkraut (\$10.95). My wife finished her borsch, which came with a meat-stuffed browned rolled pastry (\$3.50), and plowed through about half of her crisp breaded pork loin (\$10.95). Not long after, our Polish-accented waitress brought over the dessert platter holding the most amazing napoleon I ever ate (\$4). **-D.R.W.**

* Yang Chinese Restaurant

28 East Roosevelt Road; 312-986-1688.

CHINESE

Tucked into the ground floor of the South Loop's historic Roosevelt Hotel, this is a popular place for takeouts before hitting the nearby el stop. It's also a bright spot for BYO dining (\$2 corkage), with its cheery owner, An Chi Yang, making sure patrons are satisfied. I am. It's not a place for exotica but rather for well-made stalwarts like egg foo young (\$3.95 small