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## News

### Valentine's Dining Defies Recession

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For Harvard Square eateries, Valentine's Day indicated that love is blind—even to recessions.

Every restaurant contacted reported dining rooms booked solid with celebrating couples ordering as if the housing crisis had never happened.

And managers and owners said diners did not scale back, ordering prix fixe menus as well as tipping generously.

Valentine's Day's weekend placement may also have contributed to the crowds, as Saturday nights tend to be busy for restaurants.

While business on the lover's holiday seems not to have slumped, the local restaurant industry hasn't dodged the effects of a declining economy, as diners have cut back on discretionary spending.

One such casualty was café Z Square on JFK Street, which closed its doors in January after management complaints and flagging profits.

At Small Plates, which opened in late 2007, co-owner Jerome R. Picca said that all the tables had been booked a week and a half in advance of the holiday.

"You would never have guessed there was some kind of economic problem in the country based on what the sales and tipping were on Valentine's Day," he said.

At Upstairs on the Square, the outlook was rosy, even outside of the holiday.

Matthew C. Lishanky, director of operations, said that Upstairs has seen little to no change in business overall—possibly even a small uptick.

Lishanky said that Feb. 14 had been booked far in advance, with 30 people hoping for an opening on the restaurant's waitlist.

As for Valentine's Day, "There wasn't an empty table from 11 in the morning until midnight," said Mary-Catherine Deibel. Upstairs offered two fixed-price menus, either \$85 or \$125, depending on where they dined in the restaurant.

And the servers felt the love too.

"Tipping's very good on Valentine's Day," Deibel said. "Everyone's trying to impress their date."

Paul D. Consorti, president and co-founder of desserterie Finale, said that despite the economy, diners have been turning out in force for special occasions and weekend nights, and Valentine's Day was no exception.

The restaurant, which focuses on desserts, was fully booked during main dining hours on Saturday.

Consorti said that while business has been lagging on early weekday nights and that diners are spending a bit less on average, people still want to celebrate. "The time you would expect us to be busy, we're still busy," he said.

Ivan T. Law, the general manager of Harvest, said that he has seen an increase in business at the bar, where food is less expensive than the main dining room. "People are definitely more conscious about where they're spending their money," Law said.

But the restaurant, like others in Harvard Square, was booked two weeks in advance of Valentine's Day. Law said that business on Saturday was "fantastic."

It was the same story at Rialto in the Charles Hotel, where diners didn't skimp on dinner, often opting for tasting menus.

"It was one of the busier valentine's days in recent history," said general manager Michael J. Mooney. "Even to the last moment, people were calling all morning long for reservations."

Christy Leveroni, dining room manager at Chez Henri, a French-Cuban restaurant close to the Quad, recalled business was the same as the last time Valentine's fell on a Saturday, back in 2004.

Though she recounted horror stories from other struggling eateries, Leveroni said Chez Henri has been "cushioned," for the most part.

"[Diners are] still coming in," she said. "The bar is full every night."

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