

Have what it takes to be Tampa Bay's Ultimate Bartender?



Go to: tampabay.com/tbt to sign up.

Deadline for bartenders to sign up is May 26.

On May 27, tbt* readers can vote for their favorite. Winning bartender will appear on the cover of tbt*'s "Out There" section on Friday, June 27.

Must be at least 21 years of age and a resident of the Tampa Bay area. Submission deadline is May 26, 2008. Voting ends June 22, 2008. Complete rules at contests.tampabay.com

RATTLE AND YUM

By Elisabeth Dyer
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The Eastern diamondback, also known as *crotalus adamanteus*, is the largest and most dangerous venomous snake in the United States.

Pretty tasty, too — according to a man named George End, that is.

In 1939, the failed farmer with a get-rich dream put a South Tampa area on the map: Rattlesnake, Fla. He set up a snake pit at the foot of the Gandy Bridge. A cannery and post office soon followed to ship canned rattlesnake in supreme sauce and snake snacks around the globe.

Back then, diamondbacks lived roughly one per 20 acres in these parts. In some areas, rattlers were as dense as one per acre. Today, they may be extinct in South Tampa, he said.

A half-century ago the diamondback was luxury dining; 5-ounce-tin went for \$1.25, steep back then. Most people don't remember the community where rattlesnake emerged as a delicacy, but the reptile still has a place at Spotos Steak Joint in Dunedin, where appetizers are \$10.

"It tastes like a cross between chicken and veal," said owner Jimmy Stewart, who buys diamondbacks from a farm in Colorado, then hickory smokes them, minus their deadly fangs. He slices, char grills and serves them on a pile of tobacco onions, glazed with a Pan-Asian barbecue. He also serves up Burmese python, crocodile and kangaroo, with a light chocolate sauce. He's waiting on a shipment of lion meat.



Joseph Garnett Jr./tbt

Western diamondback rattlesnakes are on the menu at Spotos Steak Joint in Dunedin. Mmmm ... serpent.

David Lueck, who catches snakes and other wildlife in the Tampa Bay area, comes across only one or two Eastern diamondbacks a year. He gets calls from around MacDill Air Force Base and several from North Tampa, he said. Often the snakes are other kinds of rattlers, smaller and less dangerous than the diamondback.

The city of Rattlesnake no longer exists, but people still refer to the peninsula that juts into Tampa Bay, south of the Gandy Bridge, as Rattlesnake Point.

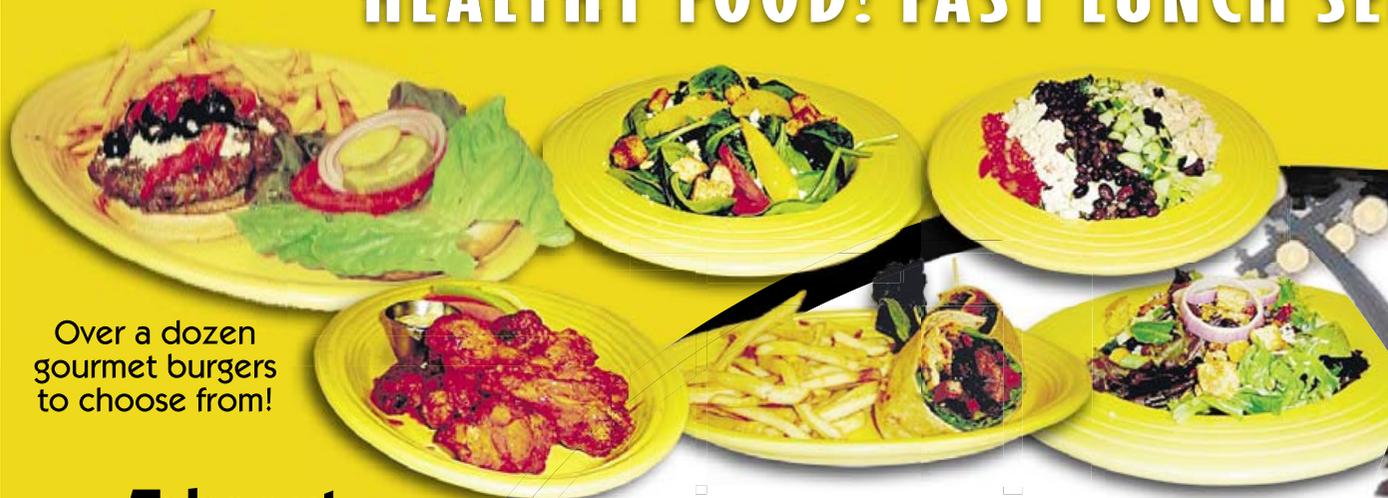
End cooked the rattlers in a pressure cooker or smoked them, then shipped them nationwide. But like South Tampa's rattlesnake industry, he died many years ago.

The cause of death? Snakebite.

Contributing: John Martin

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