



April 30, 2002

## Gage & Tollner

372 Fulton St., Brooklyn

Telephone (718) 875-5181

Open Lunch, Monday to Friday; dinner, Monday to Saturday Cost Entrees \$15-\$30

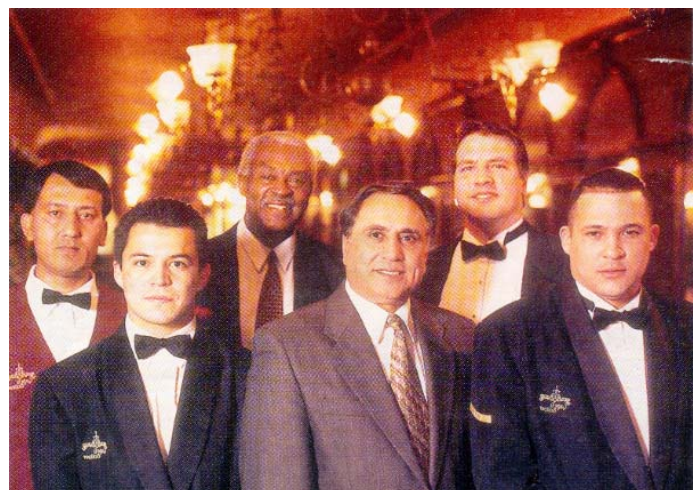
Following the ritual 7 p.m. lighting of the gaslights at this 122-year-old Brooklyn treasure, ask owner Joe Chirico to tell you about the Great New York City Blackout of 1977. This enchanted relic of 19th century Brooklyn was virtually the only place in town that didn't need candles. That's the borough in a nutshell: perpetual second-fiddle to Manhattan across the East River, but Brooklyn always comes through when the going gets tough.

Gage & Tollner, founded in 1879, is representative of the borough's fabled past, which includes the Brooklyn Bridge and the Dodgers. It is equally representative of Brooklyn's sad decline in the 1960s and '70s. When Chirico bought the place in 1995, it was hobbling. Now, it lends a touch of class to Brooklyn's Fulton Mall, a bazaar like discount shopping venue in the heart of a revitalizing downtown.

days, may make you feel as if you're Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid relishing a final good meal before boarding the ship to Bolivia, but the kitchen turns out food that deftly blends new and old. Southern specialties created by former chef Edna Lewis have been preserved, notably the succulent crabmeat Virginia and the crab cake with black bean and com vinaigrette. These are throwback dishes, but they are not prepared in a heavy, chophouse style. Broiled soft clam bellies, on the other hand, are, but that's OK. The results are delicious. Carnivores will appreciate the restaurant's refined version of surf-and-turf: steak au poivre matched with sweet, large prawns. Even more encouraging is the shrimp New-burg. One expects a heap of shrimp in a saucy puddle, but one gets tender shrimp gently dressed with a Sherry cream sauce, arranged around a cone of rice.

The wine list is short, with an emphasis on California. Many bottles-and there are some good ones-are priced under \$50. Drama can be had with dessert. A waiter wheels out a cart and proceeds to flambé strawberries in a mixture of liqueurs. Blue flames leap in the mirrors and flash across the gold faux-leather wall covering. The thusly intensified fruit is ladled over ice-cream crepes. Holy Ebbets Field! You cross water for this.

-M.D.



Surrounded by his crack dining room staff, Gage & Tollner owner Joe Chirico stands front and center in keeping a bit of Brooklyn's glory alive.