



## BEAT KITCHEN | PAGE 2

## Dinner and a band

Music, meat and Spanish mackerel were on the menu when star chef Mario Batali teamed up with Chicago's Paul Kahan and the band eighth blackbird.

## AT THE CHEF'S TABLE | PAGE 3

## French lesson

Chef Brad Phillips isn't French (he's a Hoosier). But you wouldn't know it by his beef bourguignon.

## Wines for Passover | Page 5

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 24, 2010 | EDITOR: JANET RAUSA FULLER | N

## FOOD DETECTIVE



The rise in wing prices this year can be attributed to major sporting events and the recession.

## Grabbing hold of wing costs

BY LISA DONOVAN

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**T**he flap over soaring chicken wing prices is slowly calming down. That's according to industry experts and a local purveyor of the wallet-friendly snack food inhaled by generations of beer-guzzling college students.

Figures from the U.S. Department of Agriculture show that for the first three months of the year, wholesale prices for wings averaged \$1.70 a pound, up 22 cents from the same period in 2009 (the price had fallen to \$1.59 in recent days). In 2008, wing prices were \$1.06 a pound.

The spike in recent months can be attributed to the trifecta of all sporting events—the Super Bowl, the Winter Olympics and college basketball's March Madness, says Richard Lobb, spokesman for the National Chicken Council, the industry's trade group based in Washington D.C.

Plain and simple supply-and-demand is at work here. Now that wings are a menu staple at many restaurants, demand is up and, likewise, price.

"It's not like we can get on the phone to Georgia, the biggest [chicken] production state and just order more wings. It doesn't work that way," Lobb says.

Soaring wing prices have something to do with the recession, too. Wing prices for the first time have surpassed wholesale prices of skinless, boneless chicken breasts—consistently the most expensive chicken product since the 1980s, when they came onto the market.

In today's economic downturn, people's dining habits have changed, particularly in the casual dining market, Lobb says.

"So even if you can't take your family out for dinner at some nice place, you can take your friends out for some wings and a few beers," he says.

At the year-old Wings Around the World, 510 E. 75th, owner Abeng Stuart says he's going to have to raise prices by a few pennies in April.

"It's been a tough road for me," Stuart said. "I went from paying \$1.40, \$1.45 [in August] to paying something like \$1.80, \$1.85 a pound by the Super Bowl."

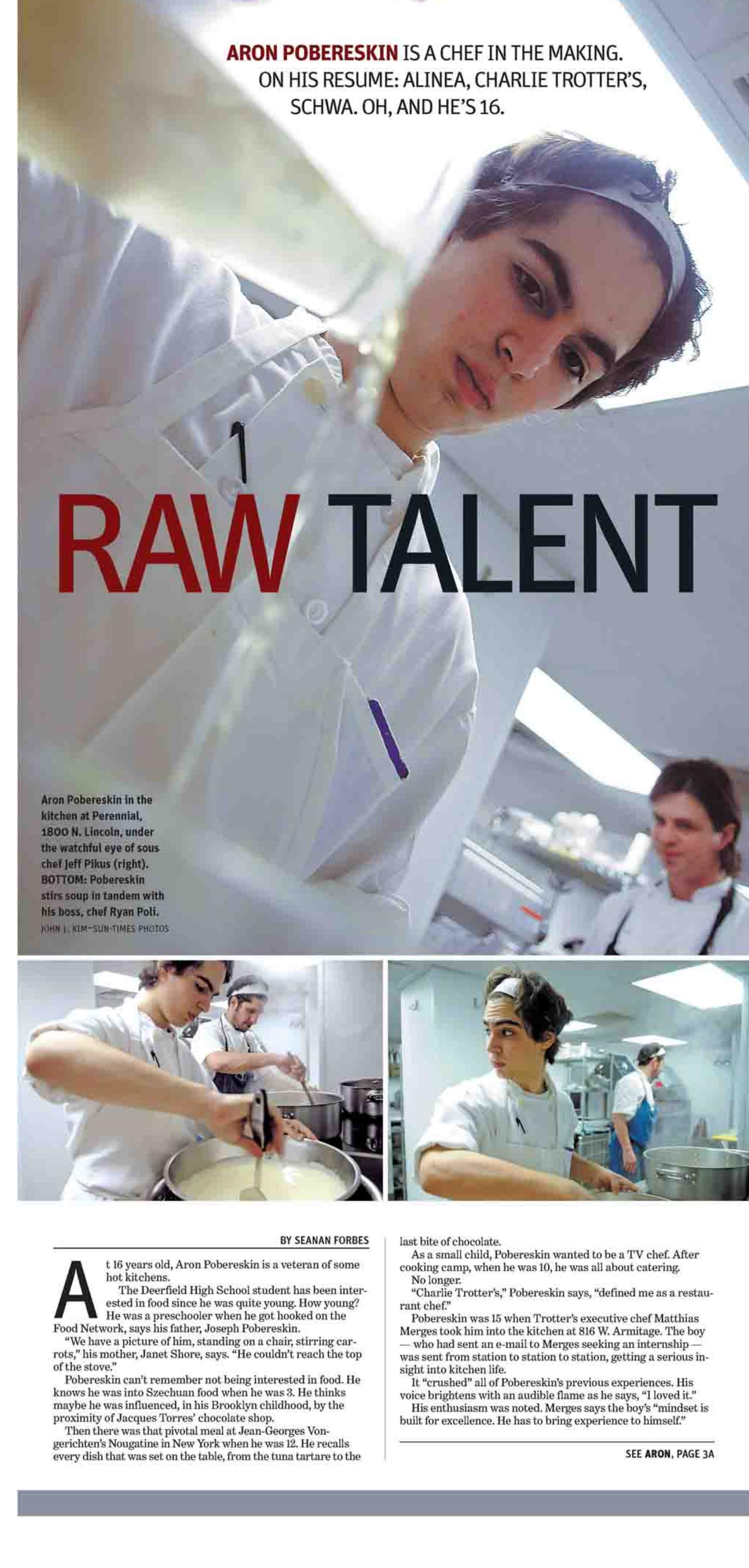
Buffalo Joe's, which has locations on the Far North Side and in Evanston, is eating the costs. Dean Holden, the micro-chain's general manager, says wholesale prices for wings jump every year around the Super Bowl, but never quite slide back down.

"I'm not going to tell you any different—it hurts the bottom line," Holden says.

The restaurant took a loss over the holidays and will make it up during the year, he says.

"We don't want to price ourselves out of the market, even though we know we've got a good thing going here," he says.

"We have [college] kids who come back for spring break, and they don't go home first—they come here if they've got \$20 in their pocket. Otherwise, they go home first and stop here second."



Aron Pobereskin in the kitchen at Perennial, 1800 N. Lincoln, under the watchful eye of sous chef Jeff Pliks (right). BOTTOM: Pobereskin stirs soup in tandem with his boss, chef Ryan Poli. JOHN J. KIM—SUN-TIMES PHOTOS

BY SEANAN FORBES

**A**t 16 years old, Aron Pobereskin is a veteran of some hot kitchens. The Deerfield High School student has been interested in food since he was quite young. How young? He was a preschooler when he got hooked on the Food Network, says his father, Joseph Pobereskin.

"We have a picture of him, standing on a chair, stirring carrots," his mother, Janet Shore, says. "He couldn't reach the top of the stove."

Pobereskin can't remember not being interested in food. He knows he was into Szechuan food when he was 3. He thinks maybe he was influenced, in his Brooklyn childhood, by the proximity of Jacques Torres' chocolate shop.

Then there was that pivotal meal at Jean-Georges Vongerichten's Nougatine in New York when he was 12. He recalls every dish that was set on the table, from the tuna tartare to the

last bite of chocolate.

As a small child, Pobereskin wanted to be a TV chef. After cooking camp, when he was 10, he was all about catering.

No longer.

"Charlie Trotter's," Pobereskin says, "defined me as a restaurant chef."

Pobereskin was 15 when Trotter's executive chef Matthias Merges took him into the kitchen at 816 W. Armitage. The boy—who had sent an e-mail to Merges seeking an internship—was sent from station to station, getting a serious insight into kitchen life.

It "crushed" all of Pobereskin's previous experiences. His voice brightens with an audible flame as he says, "I loved it."

His enthusiasm was noted. Merges says the boy's "mindset is built for excellence. He has to bring experience to himself."

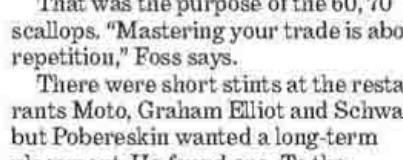
SEE ARON, PAGE 3A



Aron Pobereskin (front) gets started on dinner at his Deerfield home, while friends Lance Greenberg (from left), Eric Grossman and Nate Saed grab seats at the table. | RICHARD A. CHAPMAN—SUN-TIMES PHOTOS

# CHEF IN THE MAKING

FROM THE COVER | Deerfield teen earning kitchen chops in some of world's best restaurants



"He doesn't pester me... He knows what he has to do. He does it," Alinea chef Grant Achatz says of 16-year-old Pobereskin.

stayed until every job was done—in its

self, a statement about Pobereskin's

determination—and the Deerfield teen still

"does it really well," Achatz says.

He does it well," Achatz adds.

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the very, very basics with him.

"Sometimes, we catch ourselves using

terms that he might not know yet."

Brunoise of apples. "I'm sorry, man.

It's like a little small dice."

"He knows a lot," Poli continues.

Pobereskin swears that he has time

just to be a kid, hang out with his

friends, be on the computer, play his

baseball, do his homework. At Perennial,

he's a good student," Poli says.

"He works," Poli says. "He can see

everything that's going on around him ...

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