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## EAT

# star struck

## When a Hollywood celeb invades a restaurant, business booms

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*Pioneer Press*

Lindsay Lohan was smitten with Chino Latino in Minneapolis and dined at the trendy restaurant a few times during the filming of "A Prairie Home Companion" last summer. Cast mate Meryl Streep called the pie at Punch Neapolitan Pizza in St. Paul the best pizza she has ever had. And Charlize Theron liked Whistling Bird enough to mention the Iron Range restaurant in interviews.

When Hollywood celebrities come to Minnesota to shoot a movie, they have to eat somewhere. The stars of "A Prairie Home Companion," which opens in theaters Friday, were all around the Twin Cities as they filmed at the Fitzgerald Theater in downtown St. Paul. Before that, the cast members of "North Country" were out and about while filming in the Iron Range.

Restaurateurs and chefs say the stars left any Hollywood attitude at home while dining at their restaurants and were nothing but Minnesota nice. Some were even generous enough to use their celebrity status to give business a boost.

Lohan created some hype when she dined at Chino Latino on at least four occasions, even though she tried to keep a low profile. "She was fairly inconspicuous," says chef Noah Barton. "People definitely noticed she was here, but everyone let her enjoy her meal."

The visits to Chino Latino garnered attention on gossip sites, in which some witnesses claimed Lohan, 19, drank alcohol while at the restaurant. But Barton says that's not true.

It took just one visit to Punch Neapolitan Pizza in St. Paul's Highland Park by Streep to create a buzz that still lives. Streep ordered the Borgata pizza, named after a ski run in Italy, which includes basil, goat cheese, eggplant and olives. Shortly before the Minnesota premiere of "A Prairie Home Companion" a few weeks ago, Streep declared the restaurant serves the best pizza.

"The effect it has had has just been incredible. It meant a lot," says co-owner John Puckett. "We have had so many new people come into our restaurant. It's still crazy."

Puckett recalls how low-key it was when the two-time Oscar winner was at his restaurant. Customers turned their heads to catch a few glimpses but mostly let Streep and her three guests have their privacy.

It was a different story when Minnesota's silver-screen heartthrob Josh Hartnett came into the restaurant last month to pick up a pizza.

"He was standing by the bathrooms, and this 15-year-old girl came out and saw him and started hyperventilating," Puckett says. "He said it was OK and introduced himself. She calmed down eventually. I'm sure it made her day."

Like the owners of Punch, Tony and Pat Curtis can relate to the difference it makes when Hollywood stars plug their restaurant.

While filming "North Country" in the winter and spring of 2005, Oscar winner Charlize Theron and cast members, including Sissy Spacek and Woody Harrelson, made appearances at Whistling Bird restaurant in Gilbert, Minn. Theron later gave accolades to the restaurant's coconut shrimp in interviews.

To this day, the dish — shrimp deep-fried in tempura batter and coconut served with a side of wasabi orange marmalade — continues to be in high demand.

"We've just gotten bombarded with coconut shrimp orders. At first, we didn't know she mentioned us in interviews, and our cooks were wondering what was going on," Curtis says. "We've always had a reputation for our coconut shrimp, but it was never that popular."

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JOSH HARTNETT SEEN AT PUNCH PIZZA



MERYL STREEP SEEN AT PUNCH PIZZA

### STAR-STUDED DINING

Where did the cast of movies like "North Country" and "A Prairie Home Companion" eat when they were filming in Minnesota? Here are some restaurants where they were spotted:

#### Meryl Streep

**Restaurant:** Punch Neapolitan Pizza, 704 S. Cleveland Ave., St. Paul; 651-696-1066

**The buzz:** Declared it the best place she has ever had pizza.

#### Maya Rudolph

**Restaurant:** Saji-Ya, 695 Grand Ave., St. Paul; 651-292-0444

**The buzz:** Rudolph must have liked the sushi at the restaurant that cast mate Lily Tomlin had delivered for "A Prairie Home Companion" cast and crew, because she later visited the restaurant.

#### Maya Rudolph and John C. Reilly

**Restaurant:** La Grolla, 452 Selby Ave., St. Paul; 651-221-1061

**The buzz:** They preferred the restaurant's garden patio while dining.

#### Lindsay Lohan

**Restaurant:** Chino Latino, 2916 Hennepin Ave. S., Minneapolis; 612-824-7878

**The buzz:** Her visits caused discussion on gossip Web sites after some witnesses at the trendy dining spot claimed the 19-year-old was drinking alcohol, which restaurant management denies.

#### Woody Harrelson

**Restaurant:** Azia Restaurant and Bar, 2550 Nicollet Ave. S., Minneapolis; 612-813-1200

**The buzz:** The "North Country" and "A Prairie Home Companion" actor has been in the restaurant a few times, almost always with a large group. Says owner Tom Pham, "He's very social. He always gets the party started."

#### Charlize Theron, Sissy Spacek, Woody Harrelson

**Restaurant:** Whistling Bird, 101 N. Broadway St., Gilbert, Minn.; 1-218-741-7544

**The buzz:** The cast of "North Country" made appearances at this family-owned restaurant during three months of filming on the Iron Range. Theron mentioned the restaurant's coconut shrimp dish during interviews.

— Nancy Ngo, Pioneer Press