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Cheaper gas is a tricky calculus

Politicians avoid credit and blame

By Katie Johnston

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Gas prices have fallen 50 cents since mid-April to an average of \$3.44 a gallon nationwide and could hit \$3 a gallon by the end of the summer, a boon to consumers and businesses feeling squeezed in a difficult economy.

But politicians are remaining uncharacteristically silent on the issue. Republicans, who sharply criticized President Obama as gas prices headed toward \$4 a gallon earlier this year, don't want to associate any positive trend with the current administration. And President Obama and other Democrats are reluctant to crow about declines in energy costs that are largely the result of a slowing economy and the increasing risk of a global recession, led by Europe's debt and banking woes.

"That's sort of the paradox,"

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GASOLINE PRICE

National average retail price per gallon for regular



SOURCE: Energy Dept. GLOBE STAFF

LOADED FOR BEAR IN BROOKLINE



PHOTOS BY MICHELLE McDONALD FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

The 5-foot-tall black bear that had rambled around Cape Cod before being tranquilized and transported to Central Massachusetts two weeks ago made a return journey east, ascending a tall backyard tree in Brookline on Tuesday before being brought down by another tranquilizer dart. Environmental police said the creature will be released farther west than before. **B1.**

Harvard in fight over racist images

Swiss group aims to expose Agassiz

By Mary Carmichael
GLOBE STAFF

The 19th-century Swiss-born naturalist Louis Agassiz was a revered figure at Harvard University. He was also a racist who commissioned humiliating photographs of slaves and Brazilian natives.

A century and a half after

their creation, the images still haunt: daguerreotypes and photos of people stripped naked and displayed like specimens. To Agassiz, the images were evidence for his belief that human races sprang from different biological origins.

Now, those images are at the center of a dispute between Harvard, which owns them, and the organizer of an exhibit on Agassiz and his racism that opens this week in Grindel-

wald, Switzerland. The images will not be reproduced in that exhibit, because Harvard's Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnography will not allow it.

The museum's curators say they denied the Swiss group permission to reproduce the images because of the Peabody's blanket policy against the display of exploitative images of naked people. Other

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A Swiss group will show silhouettes of slaves.

For restaurant's staff, culture is on the menu



JONATHAN WIGGS/GLOBE STAFF

Eastern Standard wants employees to be as informed as its customers.

Urbanity is business's goal

By James H. Burnett III
GLOBE STAFF

Nine well-dressed twentysomethings sit around an oak table inside an elegantly appointed private dining and conference room at Eastern Standard in Kenmore Square.

They take in a video of a talk by neuroeconomist Paul Zak about how friendly gestures cause the body to emit oxytocin, a chemical that makes pleasant people more likeable.

It's not the usual training for a restaurant's staff.

Training for employees of Eastern Standard is not just about how to pronounce "moules Provençales" and the right way to pour wine. It includes a unique repertoire that seeks to make employees fully versed in the culture and politics of our times. How? Think book reports about historical figures and their neighborhood,

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To work at this restaurant, staffers learn about life

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as well as field trips to other cities to study culture and ambience, and group discussions about the meanings of life.

"Learning about life," chef de cuisine Matt Audette calls it.

The idea is for restaurant staffers to be able to be as urbane and well-informed as the customers they serve.

"You never know around here," Audette said. "I've been a chef about eight years. Before I came to Eastern Standard eight months ago, I had never seen anything like this. Learning meant what was new for that day. Here learning is about what's interesting, whether or not it's immediately relevant. I swear there's a certain swagger here, because the staff feels smarter — is smarter — because of how we do things."

Now that he's comfortable in the Eastern Standard system, Audette said, when his cooks ask a question, whether or not he knows the answer he tells them to look it up and write a report.

"I know my cooks don't always like it," he said, "but they're better for it."

All this is the brainchild of restaurant owner Garrett Harker. When he opened Eastern Standard seven years ago, after an eight-year partnership with Boston restaurant maven Barbara Lynch, Harker, who is from Baltimore and managed top restaurants in San Francisco, knew he wanted the place to be a different kind of different.

"Often when people think different, in terms of a restaurant or a cocktail lounge, they mean different food or different takes on traditional food," Harker said. "That should be a given. I meant, additionally, different in terms of how the staff is cultivated. You see servers who can't carry on a conversation or can't convincingly discuss a menu. I wanted smart people, because smart people communicate well. And I knew that in order to achieve that end we had to motivate them and keep them motivated."

So it made sense recently when server and part-time service manager Kelly Shea stood during a pre-dinner meeting, handed out papers to her colleagues, and gave them a synopsis of her report on Charlie Trotter, a self-taught Chicago chef with a political science degree.

"Charlie Trotter always felt like he learned to make good food because he got to know people," Shea explained. "He traveled the world, especially Europe, and he talked to people, a lot."

At another recent meeting,



JONATHAN WIGGS/GLOBE STAFF

Owner Garrett Harker (left) wants Eastern Standard to be different, so training emphasizes culture and politics.

Nissa Burns, a 22-year-old server who has worked at Eastern Standard for two years, reported on a famous person she'd like to meet.

"There are a lot," said Burns, who says customers are often surprised when she discusses travel and history with them after revealing she's not a college student. "But Mother Teresa would have been one. I mean, who understood service better than her."

"I thought it was weird at first, but I'm committed to learning the business. And Garrett's convinced me that I'll learn it best if I learn about everything, *everything*. So when customers ask, I like to say I attend the University of Eastern Standard."

Manager Molly Harper, who hosts the "Topic of the Week" segment at staff meetings, said Harker has always made clear that he wants his crew of 130 to be so sharp that members could win at least a few rounds of "Jeopardy," regardless of topic.

"We definitely do homework assignments on food and beverage topics," Harper said. "One of our newer bartenders, recently promoted, prepared a presentation for everyone on the role of bitters in a good cocktail."

"He went all out, with slides and charts and history. And we had a pastry chef bring to a staff meeting a machine she uses at her station to prepare pastry and did a demonstration on how it's used. But some of my favorites have been about the neighborhood."

Before the start of this Major League Baseball season, the Eastern Standard staff spent a week doing reports for each other on the history of the Boston Red Sox and Fenway Park.

In December, a dozen employees were sent to Maine in teams of two — some to seek out and sample new restaurants and bars, others to study the vibe and atmosphere in destination cities like Portland. Employees are paid for time

spent in classes and on trips.

Christopher Muller, dean of the School of Hospitality Administration at Boston University, said Harker's teaching and motivating techniques are unusual enough that the atmosphere in Eastern Standard is noticeably different than at most venues in its category.

"There's nothing worse than a server who can't talk to you, because they simply don't know anything, they don't have enough knowledge, literally, to speak well about anything not on the menu," Muller said. "What Garrett does is force his staff to be interesting. It is the artful component of the restaurant business. And it isn't easy, or else everyone would be doing it."

Christopher "Kit" Paschal, senior bartender at Eastern Standard, said he is never surprised when newer employees like Carmany change their tunes about field trips and homework assignments.

"I just had an epiphany, a revelation that informing customers is my favorite part of the job," Paschal said. "Seriously, I mean telling them something they really didn't know."

When he first started working at Eastern Standard three years ago, if a customer had asked for an after-bar recommendation, Paschal would have been stumped, he said.

Asked that question recently by a pair of Australian tourists, Paschal spent 20 minutes asking them about their interests and offering anecdotes about Boston's rich Revolutionary history.

"By the time we were done talking, I had helped them map out what they were going to do just about every one of the four days they were going to be visiting," he said. "It hit me then that's what all this stuff is about that Garrett makes us do. And I've got to tell you, it felt great."

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