through the store and warehouses with the energy and enthusiasm of a gourmet-food Willie Wonka, it's easy to believe that claim.

White anchovies, trays of grilled artichokes in oil, black trumpet mushrooms, baby sweet potatoes, nopales, sea beans, white asparagus (''52 weeks a year!'' Wainer exclaims), quail eggs from Connecticut, baby coconuts and bananas, edible orchids, squash blossoms flown in daily from Israel, eight varieties of unpasteurized imported olives—the variety is overwhelming. ''I've got 146 varieties of dried beans and grains!'' declares Wainer, racing past cartons in the warehouse. ''Purple sticky rice! Butterscotch beans! Himalayan red rice.''

The store is in a former blanket factory on Purchase Street, not far off Route 195. Bring a cooler, in case you buy anything perishable. You've still got a long day ahead.

If you've worked up an appetite walking through Wainer's store, how about a lunch break? Both New Bedford and nearby Fall River are home to numerous Portuguese restaurants that are unmatched in the area for authenticity. This is a cuisine that's lately become the darling of trendy foodies—it was the highlighted aspect of the James Beard Foundation's recent Mediterranean Culinary Festival in New York—but in Fall River and New Bedford, it's a well-established tradition.

Sagres restaurant on Columbia Street in Fall River is one of the oldest, run by the Silva family, it has been serving the community for nearly 24 years. ''Everything here is 100 percent Portuguese,'' says Victor Silva proudly. That means the focus is on seafood, olive oil and fresh ingredients. A popular specialty is the seafood stew, fragrant with garlic, but don't miss the traditional salt cod dishes or the pork alentejana—stewed with littlenecks—which Silva says his chef father introduced to the area.

Also popular are the T.A. Restaurant on South Main Street and Terra Nostra on Rodman Street. Fall River remains more gritty that pretty, but the economic picture there, as elsewhere, has improved in recent years. Terra Nostra proprietor Manuel Cardoso says that the city's ''going in the right direction''; his one complaint now is that low unemployment makes it hard to find wait staff.

But if you're not in the mood for Portuguese, Fall River holds at least one other interesting option. A couple years back, chef George Karousos, whose family owns two restaurants in Rhode Island, fulfilled a long-held dream and opened the International Institute of Culinary Arts in Fall River. Housed in a beautifully restored former church, the school trains future chefs in both the classroom and in the kitchen. Students staff the Abbey Grill restaurant, turning out creative American fare under the direction of their instructors; the open kitchen is also largely in view of the customers. Try the sweet-salty coconut-crusted shrimp, the creamy clam chowder or the swordfish in a chunky sauce of olives, capers and tomatoes.

Then roll yourself away from the table and press on; the Westport Harvest Festival only runs until 5 p.m. In Fall River or New Bedford, it might be hard to imagine you're in one of the most agricultural counties in the state; head south on Route 88, and you'll quickly find yourself in farm country so rural and pristine it could be western Massachusetts—but with a seacoast flavor.

Festival vice president Lorraine Roy says of the event, now in its ninth year, ''Our primary theme is fishing, farming and agriculture.'' A farmers market displays the bounty of the region, but the fair's events are as far-ranging as a pumpkin weigh-off, a poetry contest, a juried craft fair and an animal tent. Non-profit groups and restaurants will field food booths with fare Roy describes as low-priced and family-oriented: ''Anywhere from clams and lobster rolls to spareribs and chicken barbecue dinners.''

How did the festival get its start? Like many other agricultural-oriented projects in the area, the road leads to Rob Russell, proprietor with his wife, Carol, of Westport Rivers Winery. Roy says a local businessman approached Russell with the idea after seeing a similar festival on a trip to California.

The winery is another noteworthy stop on your itinerary; you could fit in a visit after the festival. The Russells bought the land in 1982 and planted it with a variety of classic wine grapes. Today, they turn out a number of award-winning wines and have added a wine-and-food-education center and, most recently, a brewery. As important as the products at Westport, though, is the philosophy: The Russells have thrown themselves into efforts to protect the area's agriculture.

That aim requires both effort and commitment, because, like many rural areas, this one is threatened by development. When the farm that now houses the brewery, for instance, was up for sale, the Russells bought it to keep it from being turned into another subdivision; they plan eventually to grow the hops that go into their Buzzards Bay beers.

A place this rich in resources—the Russells call it a farm, fish, food and wine region unique in the United States—was bound to attract the attention of chefs. Many local chefs visit the area and buy from the farmers. Chris Schlesinger, owner of Cambridge's East Coast Grill, has gone so far as to open a restaurant there. Dinner at the Back Eddy, where the focus is on ingredients that are locally grown and caught, would be the perfect way to wind up your day of exploring.

Actually, Schlesinger's Westport roots go back much farther than the opening of the restaurant in April. He has owned a house there for seven years, and worked as a chef at the Sakonnet Golf Club, just over the Rhode Island border in Little Compton, 17 years ago. It reminds him of the Virginia coast, where he grew up, both in its farm-and-ocean terrain and its low key character. ''It's not like other coastal areas that have been developed for more elite situations,'' he says. ''Everything is low-key and calm; nobody's trying to make the scene, nobody's in your face.''

As a restaurateur, he appreciates the access to ingredients the waterfront location lends: ''We have fishing boats in front, (farmers') pickup trucks in back.'' He buys seafood right off boats that swing by the dock.

Schlesinger borrows an analogy from Bob Russell when describing the area's present, and possible future. To remain sustainable, the farms themselves have to be part of the draw; the Heritage Farm Coast, as it's sometimes called, could be promoted as something like ''the Sonoma of the East Coast.''

Meanwhile, though it isn't glamorous, there's something wonderfully unspoiled about this underappreciated area of the state. ''It's funky, not pristine beautiful,'' says Schlesinger, ''I want to spend the rest of my life there.''

HONORING VIRGIL COVINGTON, PRINCIPAL—WINBURN MIDDLE SCHOOL

HON. ERNIE FLETCHER

OF KENTUCKY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, October 28, 1999

Mr. FLETCHER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge an outstanding leader within the Central Kentucky educational community. A man who has dedicated his life to not only improving education—but making sure students strive to do the best they possibly can. He is a principal who has touched and improved the lives of so many throughout his years of dedicated service to our community—and I applaud the recognition of his commitment.

Recently, the Kentucky Education Commissioner recognized this outstanding principal—Mr. Virgil Convington—as a recipient of the National Educators Award from the Milken Foundation. Next summer, Mr. Covington will join other educators in California for a week-long conference—but today he receives praises and congratulations from the school system, community, parents and children that he has strived so hard to serve over the years.

It's obvious that Mr. Covington has worked to produce positive change—while making sure that no one is left behind within the Winburn Middle School and surrounding community. It's only proper that he receives this award on the eve of the 21st century—as he has been a part of the Windburn Middle School since 1990. The new millennium will mark Mr. Covington's 10th year of dedicated service.

Today—I join our community in recognizing an outstanding principal who has made a significant contribution to the field of education. I find it very fitting that Mr. Virgil Covington received this prestigious award.

HISTORIC DAY FOR DEMOCRACY IN SAN MIGUEL, EL SALVADOR

HON. JAMES P. McGOVERN

OF MASSACHUSETTS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, October 28, 1999

Mr. McGOVERN. Mr. Speaker, in November, Congressman MOAKLEY and I will travel to El Salvador at the invitation of the University of Central America to attend the commemoration of the 10th anniversary of the murders of the Jesuit leadership of that school. While this horrific event stunned that small nation and the international community, the unraveling of that case contributed to a negotiated settlement of the 12-year civil war in which over 70,000 Salvadoran civilians lost their lives.

In mid-November, we will visit a new El Salvador. While the problems of poverty and reconstruction continue to challenge the people of El Salvador, there have been many changes: demobilization of former combatants, reform of the courts, greater decentralization of services, and competitive elections where former guerrillas now comprise a political party able to campaign openly at the national and local level.

While in El Salvador, we will have the opportunity to inaugurate the second constituent service office of the National Assembly. On November 15, 1999, we will visit San Miguel where we will join elected deputies from five different political parties from across the political spectrum, who will share the resources of this office. With the assistance of the U.S. Agency for International Development, the establishment of these offices is part of a Salvadoran effort to modernize their Legislative Assembly. The constituent office will be used by the elected deputies to meet their constituents,