

DINING

The Sheik restaurant is a leader in Lebanese cuisine

BY ELEANOR AND RAY HEALD
SPECIAL WRITERS

Walk just north of downtown Rochester's main shopping area along Main Street and you'll come to the European Tudor complex named River Square, built about seven years ago. Wander in and you'll find a miniature, rather Germanic-looking village with a frame shop, building contractor, an investment office, several medical suites, and three unusual dining spots.

The Sheik, a Lebanese restaurant, the newest (open about a year) and most unlikely of the three to fit the architecture, is under the ownership of River Square Restaurants. River Square and its restaurants are the brainchild of Lebanese-born cardiologist Dr. Amr Attallah. While matching his ethnicity to The Sheik, Attallah first opened Chez Pierre Orleans specializing in creole dishes, then O'Shea's, a Cajun steak house and oyster bar. The latter name was spawned from Attallah's wife, Ruthann, and her Irish maiden name, Shea.

Rochester resident Romaine Berari, vice president of the restaurant company, explained the unique scenario: "Dr. Attallah loves the idea of fine dining," she said. "It's a hobby that got out of control." To Attallah, only two things count in dining: service and good food.

When he came to the U.S. from Lebanon, he attended Wayne State University Medical School to gain the necessary certification to practice cardiology here. He remembers The Sheik restaurant that was located in downtown De-

The Sheik, 543 N. Main (just north of University), Rochester, (810) 650-1392.
Hours: Monday to Saturday, 11 a.m.-11 p.m. Closed Sunday.
Menu: Lebanese specialties featured in a wide array of appetizers, salads, entrees, sandwiches, combination plates and desserts.
Meatless options: Special attention given to this preference with seven vegetarian appetizers, five vegetarian salads, a veggie combo with fattoush, vegetarian grape leaves, moussaka, falafel and spinach pie.
Highlights: Healthy and fresh ingredients. All sauces

created with house-made yogurt and soups made from scratch. Hand-chopped vegetables. Spit-grilled beef and chicken Shawarma is especially lean. Kibbe Naysa (raw, lean ground lamb with cracked wheat and spices) is very fresh. All entrees well garnished with vegetables and delicious rice with garlic-tomato sauce. Ample parking both surface and below ground. Valet Friday and Saturday.
Cost: Moderate. Appetizers \$3.25-7.50. Entrees \$10-13. Combo plates \$10-14.
Reservations: not needed.
Credit cards: all majors accepted.

troit. It carried memories of his homeland and he thought the food was excellent. The Detroit Sheik is closed now because there were no family members who wanted to carry on the business after the owner died.

"There's no greater tribute to it than having the name brought to the city of Rochester," Berari said. She also explained that sheik is a Lebanese term of respect for a leader.

Attallah wants to set food excellence standards and has done this at The Sheik with moderate prices. The entire ambience is unexpected for a Middle Eastern dining spot. It's upscale and focused on fine dining. Seating for 50 is in booths or at tables in a room with deep burgundy and hunter green appointments, adjacent to the bright and attractive carry-out section just inside the main entrance.

Chef Gusand Muzahem is Lebanese, and knows the cuisine of his homeland, and takes pride in preparation of such traditional dishes as kibbe (ground lamb either raw, fried or baked), grape leaves, makhaneh (Mediterranean sausage), hummus, baba ghanouj, tabbouleh, fattoush, chicken or lamb kofta, shawarma and the best veggie burger, falafel.

Full bar service is available, as are a number of bottled beers. The wine list includes some Lebanese wines for the taste adventurous.

On a recent snowy and icy evening, former Rochester resident Sam Karpis, on a business trip from Grand Rapids, noticed the restaurant sign. "I was looking to see how the old town was," Karpis said. "The Sheik reminded me of the Detroit restaurant with the same name. I love Lebanese food and usually judge it by kibbe nay-



The Sheik: Chef Gusand Muzahem (sitting) takes pride in the cuisine of his homeland, Lebanon. Waitress Jennifer Berari holds a tray containing a pot of freshly brewed Turkish coffee at the Sheik restaurant in Rochester.

es, hummus and the quality of the yogurt. All three are very good here.

Also braving the weather and on their third visit to The Sheik were Rashmi Amin and his daughter Unnati, both from Rochester Hills. "We always order the same thing because we like

it," Rashmi said. "It's chicken kofta, baba ghanouj and hummus."

The response of the Amins echoed remarks by Berari. "Repeat diners generally order the same item each time," she noted.

Newcomers should not fear experiencing a new cuisine, espe-

cially if you ask for assistance from waitperson Jenny Bloom, who lives in Rochester. She not only works the floor, but has done stints on the line in the kitchen. She can explain each Lebanese dish right down to the last spice.

Every ethnic restaurant needs a Jenny Bloom!

RESTAURANT SPECIALS

Send items to be considered for publication to: Keely Wygonik, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150, or by fax (313)591-7279.

New Year's Eve

CAFE CONTINUA
New Year's Eve celebration, DJ, dancing, all course dinner, champagne, party favors. Cost \$65 per person. Call for reservations, 30715 W. 10 Mile Road, Farmington Hills, (810) 474-3033.

MOON'S PRESERVE
Tickets \$20 per person includes full course dinner, desserts, party favors, DJ.

dancing, champagne and Continental breakfast. General admission \$10 includes party favors, champagne toast, continental breakfast, 2395 Woodward Ave., Bloomfield Hills. Call for reservations, (810) 658-7668.

MOON'S & MORGAN DISTRO
Ken Wolski Band provides the music for dancing at the restaurant in Bingham Farms Office Park. Menu to be elaborated, reservations.

TRATTORIA BALSUCCIA
Italian eatery inside Now's Hotel Baronne offers taste of Tuscany. Dancing to Top 40 sounds of Sterling's, eat at the Savory Ballroom after 11 p.m. Call for reservations, (810) 642-1094.

(810) 305-5210
HOTEL BARONETTE
Party in the Savory Ballroom, begins 9 p.m. with appetizers, feast, three drinks. Champagne & party favors, dancing to Sterling's, room at the hotel, breakfast New Year's Day. Cost \$259 per couple.

(810) 349-7800
MOON'S & MORGAN DISTRO
Ken Wolski Band provides the music for dancing at the restaurant in Bingham Farms Office Park. Menu to be elaborated, reservations.

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SEASANTIAN'S GRILL
New York bistro in Troy offers fresh pasta daily. Call for reservations, (810) 649-6552.

RELIH
Smoky flavor of Traverse City chernowood permeates the fresh creations of Chef Robert Oliver, 34555 W. 12 Mile Road, Farmington Hills, (810) 469-6852.

GENITTO'S
Seven-course Italian dinner, interactive entertainment, \$50 per person, reservations required, (810) 349-0522.

OCEANIA INN
In the Meadow Brook Village Mall, corner of Walton & Adams, Rochester Hills, now serving Dim Sum, fresh seafood, live lobster available on the new menu. Open noon to 10:30 p.m. New Year's Eve, noon to 10:30 p.m. New Year's Day, regular hours 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Monday-Saturday, noon to 10 p.m. Sundays, (810) 375-9200.

EAST SIDE MARIO'S
Metro Detroit's version of New York's Little Italy is hosting a Garlic Festival now through Jan. 21. Seven new garlic-enhanced menu items will be offered, and Garlic Village's new Turning Leaf Pinot Noir and Chardonnay will also be available. Garlic Festival entrees start at under \$8. East Side Mario's serves lunch and dinner seven-days-a-week from its Rochester Hills and Livonia locations.

UNIQUE RESTAURANT CORPORATION
Seafood Feast Jan. 17 at Trattoria Balsuccia, (810) 305-5210; Jan. 18 at Morels, (810) 642-1094; and Jan. 20 at Sebastian's (810) 649-6025. Call for details.

WINTER GETAWAY
Evening of gourmet dining and dancing, 7 p.m. Friday, Jan. 19, Schoolcraft College, Waterman Center, 16600 Haggerty, Livonia. Dinner features toast prime rib. The January Travel Orchestra will serenade

dancers after dinner. Tickets \$37.50 per person and tables of eight are available. Proceeds will be used for the Culinary Arts and Continuing Education Services - Practical Education department. (313) 462-4417.

College
DINNER BUFFET
Waterman Center, Schoolcraft College, 16600 Haggerty, Livonia. International Dinner Buffet, two seatings, 6 and 8 p.m., beginning Wednesday, Jan. 10 with Mediterranean cuisine; Jan. 17, Middle European; Jan. 24, Asian; Jan. 31, Italian. Cost is \$16.95. Reservations recommended. (313) 462-4488.

AMERICAN HARVEST RESTAURANT
Waterman Center, Schoolcraft College, opens for lunch Thursday, Jan. 11. Open noon to 1 p.m. Tuesday-Friday. Call for reservations. (313) 462-4488.

12 MOT hosts blood drive at The Ritz-Carlton

Michigan Opera Theatre, The American Red Cross and WQRS-FM 105.1 are sponsoring a "Save-A-Life" Saturday blood drive 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. Dec. 30 in the Presidential Ballroom of The Ritz-Carlton, Dearborn. Call the Red

Cross at 1-(800)-GIVE-LIFE to schedule an appointment. As an incentive, Michigan Opera Theatre will present each donor with one voucher for a May 1996 performance of the ballet "Romeo and Juliet" at the new

Detroit Opera House. The Ritz-Carlton, Dearborn in the Fairlane Plaza, 300 Town Center Drive, will also offer each participant a certificate for a discounted room rate. MOT will entertain with performers and cus-

tomed donors of their own. Dearborn Music will also offer incentives by giving the first 100 donors compact disks.

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