

DINING

Norman's Eton Street Station has great food, atmosphere

BY STEVE SIMMONS
STAFF WRITER

Birmingham's historic train station found a new life when it was converted into a spectacular restaurant — Norman's Eton Street Station.

"Before I came to work here, I (already) loved the restaurant," said Dan Linnen, who had dined there previously. He joined the staff as general manager five months ago.

Ever since the restaurant first opened in 1984, the crowds have kept coming to enjoy the dining and atmosphere. The main dining room has a high ceiling, and a high noise level that only adds to the mood of the group socializing there.

Always popular with singles (age range around 30 to 50), the restaurant has a main dining room joined by an area that seats 25 at a circular bar and has 20 more seats along the side wall and back.

For people who like quieter dining, other rooms include the "A" room, just off the main dining room, and the tunnel on the lower level (which used to lead directly to the trains), as well as the upstairs dining room. Both the tunnel and the room upstairs are not and the room upstairs are

sometimes used for private parties.

In the main dining room and bar area, the vivid scene is set with four giant, petrified palm trees in terra-cotta pots, above eye level, accenting the length of the room. The curved ceiling, painted terra-cotta when the train station was redone as a restaurant, has been repainted within the last few months to a heavenly periwinkle blue, accented with gold.

"That's Norman's decorating," said Bonnie LePage, referring to her restaurateur husband. Besides Norman's Eton Street Station, the couple owns East Side Mario's in Rochester, Livonia and (coming in April) Southfield and operates Mac and Ray's in Harrison Township.

Food to match

Eton Street Station occupies about 10,000 square feet, a spacious background for its 190 seats. With menu offerings that match its good looks, the restaurant serves up tasty salads, pasta, seafood and beef.

On a recent afternoon, Mr. and Mrs. Vincent Kalts of Troy were celebrating their 45th wedding anniversary. He had the seafood

NORMAN'S ETON STREET STATION

■ Where: 245 S. Eton, near Maple Road, Birmingham, (810) 647-7774

■ Hours: 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. Mon and Tues; 11 a.m. to 12:30 a.m. Wed-Sat; 10:30 a.m. until 9 p.m. Sunday, with brunch buffet 10:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

■ Menu: Salads, pasta, seafood, steaks, burgers and homemade buns.

■ Vegetarian friendly? Yes.

■ Highlights: Occupies renovated train station built in 1931. Several dining rooms and bar area. Only Birmingham restaurant with dancing. House band plays for dinner (7:30-9 p.m.) and dancing (9 p.m. to midnight) Wed., Fri. and Sat. Different blues group plays 7-11 p.m. each Thursday.

■ Cost (range): Lunch and dinner entrees \$8.95 to \$19.95. Sunday buffet \$13.95 per person.

■ Reservations needed? Recommended.

■ Credit cards: All major ones.

fettuccine, declaring, "It's scrumptious. The noodles are like what my own mother made years ago."

She has the hazelnut chicken, one of her favorite dishes there, and said she also favors the restaurant's planked whitefish. "It's a toss-up — which do I get," whenever they visit.

At a nearby table, four buddies, all retired from Ameritech Publishing in Troy, got together for lunch. Dave Beamer of Rochester Hills said, "The chicken pot pie was the best I ever had." Jack Bučko of Rochester Hills called the omelet "excellent." "It was a good meal," agreed Dan Harmon

of Farmington Hills, who had ordered the taco salad. James Barnes of Birmingham rated the cajun turkey salad as "fine."

Linnen, the new general manager, is from Northern Michigan, where he ran his own restaurant and bar. Linnen's also has a new chef, Mark Elcholic, who has a background with seafood and the Mueser organization. Linnen said the restaurant he owned "was more of a beef house. I'm a stickler on fresh carved beef. We keep each other in check."

"We've expanded the whitefish section. It's such a seller," said Bonnie LePage. At both lunch



Train Station: Dan Linnen joined the staff at Norman's Eton Street Station as general manager five months ago.

and dinner, five whitefish dinners are offered — planked, potato-enrusted, grenoblaise, meunier and heart healthy.

Beef eaters too

She pointed out that although dinner today are more health conscious, they still enjoy eating beef. Over the holidays, "We could not keep up with cutting filets of

New York (strip steak)."

LePage said she has not been able to persuade customers to order low-fat or no-fat salad dressings. "They all wanted blue cheese and ranch. But Mark made a raspberry vinaigrette he introduced on the spring menu, and it has been received real well."

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