

DINING

# Bistro Allegro dishes out funky, comfy foods

BY ELEANOR & RAY HEALD  
SPECIAL WRITERS

Since September and the arrival of Chef Kirk Robinson at Pontiac's Bistro Allegro, it has been using the word "new" to describe itself — "new" chef, "new" menu and the very good news "new" low prices. This is not a come on. Prices have been reduced for a menu of comfy foods.

"There are no pates and esoteric dishes that people don't understand," manager Theodore "Theo" Oresky noted. "We call it creative American cooking with dishes such as potato and mushroom cakes for an appetizer, warm potato salad to accompany grilled salmon and basil whipped potatoes as a side with pan roasted pork cutlet."

To understand Bistro Allegro requires a short time warp. For many years, the location has housed a sister eatery to the upscale Pike Street Restaurant under the ownership of Jim Fitzpatrick, an avid supporter of downtown Pontiac for 14 years. Chimayo lived a good life until the southwest food fad died out. It changed to Allegre emphasizing Mediterranean cuisine, but what it served was too close in character to Pike Street and, in particular, carried a hefty price tag. As Bistro Allegro, under a "new" concept there has been a true rebirth.

In Paris or London, Bistro Allegro would have a line waiting down the block because it's deliberately funky with good food. Decor is upbeat deco. There's everything from mock Corinthian pillars to an Olympic poster. Serious modern art graces the wall next to something rather outrageous. One window valance sports the colors of the American flag, while deliberately cracked plaster sets a mood on an opposite wall.

But make no mistake, there are white tablecloths and friendly, knowledgeable wait staff. The wine list is bigger and better than some touted upscale restau-

**Bistro Allegro**  
Where: One North Saginaw, Pontiac, (810) 338-7337  
Hours: Lunch, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday-Friday; Dinner, 5:10 p.m. Tuesday-Thursday, 5 p.m. to midnight Friday-Saturday.  
Menu: Creative American with mix of Mediterranean, southwest and Asian lighter fare. Good number of starters including soup of the day, salads, sandwiches (both lunch and dinner), pastas and wide range of entrees.  
Meatless options: Salads, pastas and entrees such as Grilled Vegetable Enchilada with Green Chili Rice and Tomato Red Pepper Sauce.  
Highlights: Live music starting beginning at 8:00 p.m. Thursday and 9:00 p.m. Friday and Saturday.  
Cost: Salads \$3-6, sandwiches \$5-7 at lunch and dinner. Entrees \$5-9 at lunch and \$12-17 at dinner.  
Reservations: Suggested Friday and Saturday.  
Credit cards: all majors accepted.

rants with easy on the wallet wine-by-the-glass pours for \$3-\$5. A full-service bar lines one wall and we counted six draft beers including Pontiac's King's Brewery Cherry Ale and the hit of Dublin pubs, Guinness Stout. "On a Friday or Saturday night, wine accounts for 30 percent of total restaurant sales," Theo said.

Patrons' repeat favorites are Broiled Whitefish with Artichoke Hearts, Tomatoes and Capers \$12 and Pan Roasted Pork Cutlet Stuffed with Mushroom Duxelle and Basil Whipped Potatoes \$16. The top-price item at \$17 is Grilled Ribeye Steak with Baked Beans and Crispy Vegetables. These are not run-of-the-mill beans. Slow-baked with dark rum, they are prize-winning.

Sandra Rashleigh of Shelby Township and Ward Miller of Clarkston were at Bistro Allegro for the first time because of a word of mouth recommendation. She thought the Jamaican Jerked Chicken Breast was "mild and pleasant" and he pronounced the Calamari with Lemon Basil Dip "phenomenal." Auburn Hills resident Paul Ferrari who has an office in Pontiac had a large table of business associates, both locals and out-of-towners. At this table, Marilyn Rich of Livonia thought the Poccacia Pizza with Mushrooms and Three Cheeses was "particularly tasty." Other table comments included another vote for the Calamari as "tender," but the Jerk Chicken was considered "bland." Both the Caesar and House salad draw high praises and getting an easy substitution of the side for grilled salmon was "impressive — some places refuse to do this."

Chef Kirk Robinson is a Culinary Institute of America graduate who was most recently at Royal Oak's Durango Grill. Prior to that he apprenticed with chef Brian Polcyn (now owner of Five Lakes Grill in Milford). "He brings calmness, stability and focus to our kitchen," Theo said. "That's something that has been lacking." And Theo should know because at age 35 he is a 20-year veteran of area restaurants. He's worked his way up, starting dishwashing at age 16 and has held several management positions since he was 17.

While we saw a family celebrating a son's birthday one evening, recently, the restaurant is not deliberately family oriented. After the live music starts on Thursday through Saturday, Bistro Allegro is adult and jumping, attracting a number of late-nighters from Pontiac's other clubs.

Fun and funky, with good food at reasonable prices, Bistro Allegro will make a good discovery for those who have not been to this Pontiac location recently.



Bistro: Theo Oresky, manager (left to right), Chef Kirk Robinson, and Jim Fitzpatrick, restaurant owner, at Bistro Allegro.

## RESTAURANT SPECIALS

Send information for Restaurant Specials to: Keely Wygonik, Taste/Entertainment Editor, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, Inc., 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150, or fax (313) 591-7279.

**SPECIAL EVENTS**  
Dolly's Middle Eastern/American Restaurant & Night Club  
Newly renovated restaurant, new owners, Louie Dolly and Nancy Taylor, 1801 S. Telegraph (between Square Lake and Orchard Lake Road), Bloomfield Hills inside Quality Inn. Middle Eastern and American cuisine, Yusuf Bahu & His Middle Eastern Review — violinist, drummer, keyboardist, and belly

dancers, appearing 9:30 p.m. to 2 a.m. Fridays and Saturdays, beginning Oct. 11. Restaurant hours are 6:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. Monday-Saturday, breakfast and lunch; 5 p.m. to midnight Monday-Thursday, dinner; 5 p.m. to 2 a.m. Fridays and Saturdays, dinner. Closed Sunday. Call (810) 334-1620 for information.

The Ritz-Carlton, Dearborn Decanter Imports of Novi presents Gala Tasting 4-8 p.m. Monday, Oct. 14 featuring 25 top wine producers from California who will be pouring and talking about their wines and the situation of the California wine industry today at the Ritz-Carlton on Fairlane Plaza in Dearborn. All Star Wine Maker Tasting and

Diner sponsored by the Ritz-Carlton and Decanter Imports 6-8 p.m. Tuesday, Oct. 16. The Oct. 14 wine tasting is \$25 per person, the dinner on Oct. 16 is \$76 per person. Call (313) 441-2100 for information.

**Unique Restaurant Corporation**  
Five Matt Prentice Restaurants will celebrate the harvest during The Michigan Fall Feast, a week-long event showcasing the abundant delicacies found within the Great Lakes State. Festivities begin 7 p.m. Tuesday, Oct. 16 at Morels, a Michigan Bistro, (810) 642-1094, with a Strolling Harvest Dinner.

The feast will feature smoked whitefish strudel; butternut squash ravioli, apple grilled turkey salad, garlic and herb crusted veal roast; and for dessert, Almond Tulle. The feast will be at America (810) 640-2000 on Oct. 16; Relish, (810)

489-8852 Oct. 17; Trattoria Brushetta (810) 306-5210 on Oct. 18; and Sebastian's Grill (810) 649-6625 on Oct. 19. The cost is \$32.95 per person, not including tax and gratuity. A wine package is available at an additional cost. Call desired restaurant for reservations.

**Cafe Cortina**  
Celebrating 20th anniversary 5-9 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 20, at the restaurant, 30715 W. 10 Mile Road, Farmington Hills. Call (810) 474-3033 for information.

**Real Seafood Company**  
First Cigar Smoker 6:30 p.m. Tuesday, Oct. 22, on the front patio, 341 S. Main Street, Ann Arbor. Fine selection cigars, single malt Scotch, specially prepared seafood dinner with choice wines. Cigar specialist will offer commentary about various tobacco and processes used to achieve desired flavors. Cost \$75 per person, inclusive. Seating limited. Call (313) 769-6560, or (313) 668-6062.

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