

DINING

Comedian's daughter takes food seriously

BY KEELY WYCONISK
STAFF WRITER

Like her father, comedian Marvin Welch, Susan Anastasiou, who named her restaurant Marvin's Bistro in his honor, enjoys entertaining, but she's a food person.

"When we're busy I feel like we're entertaining you - we're entertaining you - we're pleasing you with our food, drinks, and clean restaurant," she said. "You get that some satisfaction. It's almost an art when you do it right. We really try hard."

Marvin Welch has been an entertainer all his life. "When he's here on weekends, usually 6:30-9 p.m. Friday and Saturday, he goes to all the tables and tells his jokes and signs autographs," said Anastasiou. "They come in because they remember him."

Fate played a role in Anastasiou's staging of Marvin's Bistro. After her mother's death, Anastasiou and her father went into the attic and started going through things.

"We found an old, mildewed box, and nearly tossed it out, but something caused me to stop and look inside," she said. "She saved everything from his career. I found little newscuttings, photographs, tons of stuff. They were night life people, and that's what we want to bring to this side of town."

Inspired by her discovery, Anastasiou decorated the restaurant with her father's memorabilia, and bought a piano bar. She also hired two new chefs, Remy Berdy and Mark Benenati, and the former American Inn, run by her husband, Angelo, took on a new persona. Angelo helps out as an adviser, but Susan runs the show.

"We just put it all together," said Anastasiou. "It fell into place. We hung a few new curtains, and the lampshades are different."

Wixie

Well known to Detroit TV audiences, Welch is a comedian and wonderful singer. He was a disc jockey on WBBR but is best known for Wixie, a role he played on WXYZ-TV in the early 1960s. His Wixie costume hangs in the restaurant.

"My father got Soupy Sales started in the business," said Anastasiou. "He was a character,

Marvin's Bistro

Where: 15800 Middlebelt, (between Five Mile and Six Mile roads) Livonia, (734) 522-5600
Hours: 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. Monday-Friday; 4-11 p.m. Saturday, Bar stays open to 2 a.m.; closed to the public Sundays, open for banquets.

Menu: American regional cuisine with an Italian/French influence
Cost: Lunch ranges from \$4.95-\$6.95; dinner \$6.95 to \$13.95

Credit cards: All majors accepted

Reservations: Not necessary, but advised on Fridays and Saturdays.

Carryout: Available

Seating: 145 comfortably, handicap accessible.

Specials: Friday Lenten specials range from \$10.95-\$13.95. Two or more seafood specials will be offered every Friday, and may include: Marinated Salmon, Maryland Crab Cakes, Lemon Sole, Rebecca, Broiled Whitefish, Grilled Tuna with Citrus Sauce. Served with soup - homemade Manhattan Chowder or New England Chowder, or salad, potato and vegetable medley.

Entertainment: Carl Larson and Ernie Horvath at the piano bar, 12:30-2:30 p.m. Monday-Friday; 7-10 p.m. Monday-Tuesday; 7 p.m. to midnight Wednesday-Saturday.

still is."

Welch and his wife, Dolores, owned their own supper club on Gratiot in Roseville in the late 1950s. "He would entertain at his own club," remembered Anastasiou.

Exposed to both the food business and show business as a child, Anastasiou chose the food business for her career. "You don't want to hear me sing or see me dance," she laughed.

Chefs

Chef Remy Berdy, who worked at the Kingsley Inn, and opened the Whitney and the original Hard Rock Cafe in London, is executive chef. Mark Benenati left Disney World to work at Marvin's Bistro with Berdy.

"I was looking for the right kind of place," said Berdy explaining how he came to Marvin's Bistro. "I was looking for a free-standing restaurant and Susan was looking for a chef. We kind of fell in love. Angelo and Susan are wonderful people. They backed us, and gave us an excellent kitchen. They bought us the equipment we wanted."

Berdy is a classically trained chef and studied in Europe. He learned from master chefs, and met his wife, who is from Detroit, in Israel in 1967 during the Six Day War. He moved to the metro Detroit area with her in 1968, and never looked back.

"There's a revolution in food. People are a lot more conscious about ingredients," he said. "We create our style of cuisine, with

the accent on freshness. Michigan is very much a treasure trove."

Everything is fresh and homemade at Marvin's Bistro. "We add a little elan to the mushroom barley soup to give it a different spin, almost a whole different atmosphere," said Benenati.

The chefs are committed to keeping the enthusiasm going, and are always challenging each other. Berdy has at least 1,000 cookbooks he looks to for inspiration.

"People eat with their eyes, it's a challenge for us every day," he said. "I always look for something new and exciting. We believe in giving good portions, and explain dishes to the wait staff so they can talk to customers."

Lunch is served 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. followed by dinner. Berdy and Benenati would also like to offer a late night menu.

Appetizing choices

The chefs aim to please, and offer something for everyone's tastes. Calamari, escargot and steamed mussels are best selling appetizers, and their wild mushroom fettuccine is an often requested dish.

For lunch there are appetizers, soups including French onion and chili con carne served with tortilla strips, shredded jack cheese, diced tomato and onion; salads such as caesar,



STAFF PHOTO BY SHARON LAMBERT

At your service: Susan Anastasiou at the piano bar in Marvin's Bistro with Chef Remy Berdy (center) and Chef Mark Benenati.

grilled poached Norwegian salmon, and warm grilled chicken breast salad, and a variety of sandwiches. In addition to the usual hamburger, club sandwich, and grilled ham and cheese, you'll find a veggie pita, and the Remy Marvin Sandwich, a grilled chicken burger with pine nuts, shallots and carrots served on an onion roll.

Dinner also offers soups, sandwiches and salads for lighter appetites, along with a number of fish and seafood items such as marinated salmon, broiled whitefish, shrimp tempura and

grilled tuna with citrus sauce, chicken entrees such as Breast of Chicken Nouvelle - breast of chicken stuffed with a mushroom and spinach duxelle wrapped in puffed pastry with a glaze, grilled chicken, and Breast of Chicken Routelle; medallions of veal morel, scallops of provimi veal marsala, steaks grilled to your specifications, pasta primavera, and seafood fettuccine

Save room for dessert, white chocolate Chambard cheesecake and creme brulee are among the choices, and be sure to ask about the daily specials.

EATING OUT IN THE SUBURBS

Just in case you missed it, or lost the paper. Here are couple of the restaurants we've recently visited:

■ **Il Posto**, 29110 Franklin Road (at Northwestern Highway), Southfield (248) 827-8070. Hours: 11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. lunch Monday-Friday; 6:30-10 p.m. dinner Monday-Saturday. Menu: Impeccably served, ambitious, authentic Italian dishes from many regions of Italy. Cost: Hot and cold antipasti average \$11; homemade pasta \$17-22, main dishes \$19-25. Reservations: recommended. Credit cards: all majors accepted.

If you discovered Il Posto (translated "the place") on a trip to Italy, you'd be talking about it for months. Save the plane fare and head to Franklin Road at Northwestern Highway in Southfield for an Italian food feast, the kind you'd find in Italy's countryside outside Florence, Milan or Naples.

■ **Beans & Cornbread**, 29508 Northwestern Highway (east side between 12 Mile Road & Inlander in the Sunset Strip), Southfield, (248) 208-1680. Hours: Monday through Thursday 11 a.m. to 10 p.m.; Friday until 11 p.m.; Saturday 4-11 p.m. and Sunday until 10 p.m. Menu: In a totally non-smoking environment, Soul Food is taken into the next century. Cost: At lunch, soups, starters and sandwiches \$3-7; entrees \$6-7. Dinner starters, soups and salads \$3-10; sides \$2-4; main plates served with chef's choice of accompaniments \$8-15. Reservations: recommended at dinner. Credit cards: all majors accepted.

Gulf shrimp, fritters, down home, soul, collard greens, black-eyed peas, catfish, hoppin' John, mama's and country are eye catching menu clues. Beans and Cornbread is a way cool happening, struttin' soulful, Southern!

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