

DINING

Marco's celebrates 10th anniversary

BY KEELY WYCONIK
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There's a new menu at Marco's in downtown Farmington, but many things are the same as they were 10 years ago when Marco Conte and his sister Tina opened.

"One of us is always here. We treat customers like they're family, and get to know them," said Marco.

Executive Chef Steven Kedzeinski, like a lot of the staff has been at the restaurant since day one.

Consistent, quality, made-to-order fare are among the reasons Marco's has succeeded.

"We've all worked together for so long that our employees are like family," said Marco. "Everyone knows what they're supposed to do."

The restaurant is formal with white tablecloths, but quite comfortable. Art Deco inspired, Marco doesn't look like a traditional Italian restaurant. "I love color," said Marco, explaining why he chose soft purple, mauve and aqua accents. Nothing has changed over the past 10 years except some of the art work, and fresh flowers, which are replaced every week.

Marco's is quiet, intimate, and softly lit with candles. It's a good place to unwind after a busy day or week, close a business deal, or pop the big question to someone special.

"We've had a lot of marriage proposals here," said Marco. "I've had lots of customers ask if I could put this ring in something."

Marco now 38, was only 28 when the restaurant opened. Tina was 18 and had just graduated from Harrison High School in Farmington Hills. Both of them grew up in the business, their parents owned a restaurant, and were enthusiastic and confident.

In the beginning, Marco's menu was casual, and contained

Marco's
Where: 32758 Grand River (In Village Commons Mall) Downtown Farmington (248) 477-7777.
Hours: Lunch 11:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday-Friday; dinner 3:30 p.m. Monday-Thursday; 3:10-10:30 p.m. Friday; 4:30-10:30 p.m. Saturday. Closed Sunday.
Menu: Eclectic collection of classic Italian with innovative dishes and specials that are more "novello" (new). Pastas are served with freshly-baked bread and fresh green salad. Main courses include a side dish of pasta, vegetable and potato.
Mealless options: Many.
Highlights: Intimate, comfortable, relaxed atmosphere to enjoy the heritage of Italian food. Outdoor seating for 20 at four tables.
Restaurant seats: 85, smoking section 20 seats
Handicap access: wide front door, no steps.
Cost: Antipasti (appetizers) \$5.95-\$8.95; Zuppa (soup) \$2.50-\$3.50; pastas \$12.95 to \$17.95; Platti della Casa (main dishes) \$14.95-\$22.95. Luncheon menu includes fresh salads \$6.95-\$8.95; sandwiches \$4.95-\$5.95; pastas \$5.95 to \$12.95; entrees \$7.95 to \$13.95.
Reservations: Recommended on weekends, and for parties of six or more.
Parking: Ample self park.
Credit cards: All majors accepted.
Extras: Gift certificates available, restaurant can be reserved for private parties.

Marco Conte's wine recommendations
Reds: If you order pasta with red sauce, beef or veal
• 1996 Carment Vineyards Dynamite Cabernet Sauvignon, Sonoma, Calif., \$9 per glass, \$38 per bottle — Marco discovered this wine in Chicago eight years ago and considers it a great vintage.
• 1995 Castello Banfi Mandrielle Merlot, \$57 per bottle is a beautiful Italian red wine.
Whites: If you order chicken, fish, or pasta with cream sauce
• 1996 Santa Margherita Pinot Grigio, \$35 a bottle is dry, clean, crisp and very Italian in style.
• 1997 Groth Chardonnay, California, \$35 a bottle shows quite a bit of oakiness, but is very dry, clean, and crisp



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL BERKELEY

Toasting success: Marco Conte and his sister Tina raise their glasses in a toast to celebrate the 10th anniversary of Marco's. Filetto Alla Gorgonzola — medallions of beef tenderloin with Gorgonzola cheese and mushroom cabernet sauce, and Insalata Caprese — fresh tomato basil salad served with fresh Mozzarella cheese, are among the restaurant's most popular dishes.

many traditional Italian dishes such as ravioli, lasagna and gnocchi.

They worked to polish the service so that it would be "fine but not stuffy," said Tina. "It's like visiting with people every night, like a big party."

Marco enjoys cooking and creating new dishes. "I was always in the kitchen watching my grandpa cook," he said.

At the restaurant, he began introducing new dishes such as the popular chicken breast sautéed with Michigan cherries

and Frangelico liqueur, but kept the lasagna, gnocchi, and ravioli.

Looking at the menu with Tina and Marco is kind of like looking at a family scrapbook. Many dishes have a story behind them. The chicken dish was created after Marco received some samples of Michigan dried cherries and started experimenting with different flavor combinations.

Calamari Fritti, a popular appetizer, is an "old standby," and often requested. Linguine Alla Gaeta — linguini with olive oil, garlic, baby clams and

shrimp was created 10 years ago in honor of their father, Enzo, and his Italian hometown, Gaeta.

Filetto Alla Gorgonzola — medallions of beef tenderloin with Gorgonzola cheese and mushroom cabernet sauce — is 10 years old, and still very popular. "Every time you take a bite, it melts in your mouth," said Tina.

Filetto di Salmone Con Caperi E Funghi — broiled fillet of Norwegian salmon with mushroom caper dill sauce has been on the menu only three years, but is an example of why Marco's isn't

your typical Italian restaurant. Lambata di Vitello Alla Griglia — char-grilled veal rib chop with grilled portobello mushrooms and seasoned roasted peppers is one of Marco's favorite entrees. Tina likes the Rolatini di Melanzane — pan-sautéed eggplant rolled with Mozzarella cheese and baked with fresh tomato sauce.

Pasta dishes and entrees are served with freshly baked bread and a fresh green salad. The luncheon menu offers main dish salads, sandwiches, and variety of entrees including pasta, chicken, seafood and steaks.

Looking ahead, Marco said he wants to continue "doing a great job with my sis at this place."

"Marco and I are the best of friends," said Tina. "We take a lot of pride in our restaurant."

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