## Rustica Europa blends the best of southern Europe

Peek over cafe window coverings into this Rochester Hills

ings into this Rochester Hills catery. A pleasant surprise. A bit of southern Europe in both decor and menu offerings. Since opening in Decomber 1995 under the name Rustlen 1995 under the name Rustlen Thomas, Jr., has made cultural leaps. He added pastas in 1996 and served a total of six tables. By April that year, he had been discovered and was busting at the seams. He bought the adjacent storefront, closed for six months, and re-opened three months, and re-opened three years ago as a dinner-only

Menu items headlined in French and Italian set the expec-tations — a little bit of both on the compact menu that allows Thomas' small kitchen to make everything from scratch and to

order.

The European, Old World and Fronch country, relaxed atmosphere of Rustica provides a sense of comfort that's not noticed in national chain restauants or absentee-owner enter-

les.

It's easy to note that 34-year-old Michael Thomas loves what he does.

old Michael Thomas loves what he does.

"I've worked in restaurants since I was 14 years old," he said.
"I started as a dishwasher, then bus boy, and rose to management before I went to culinary school."

Modest but obviously round of

Modest, but obviously proud of his skills, Thomas revealed that he graduated from Scottsdale Culinary Institute in Arizona, at the top of his class with a 4.0

"For a food style. I've settled in on my southern-European family roots," he added. "Since this area did not need another traditional Italian restaurant, I chose to combine its style with southern

The principal menu changes

Rustica Europa
Where: 877 E. Auburn (northwest corner of Auburn & John R),
Rochester Hills (248) 85-20011.
Open: Monday-Thursday 4:30-9 p.m. Friday and Saturday until 10

p.m. Meau: Classically-styled cuisine of southern France and northern

Menu: Grassicolyrsysta Little
Littly.
Coett All regular menu moin dishes under \$15.
Reservations: For parties of five or more only.
Credit cards: All majors accepted.
Octalis: Full service bar.
Rustica uncorked

Rustice uncorked
Chef/proprietor Michael Thomas, Jr., knows what he likes to drink

with his food and let's you in on it.

Popperoni e Salsiccia appetition pairs perfectly with a glass of
1996 Ruffino Chienti Classico Aziano.

With Pescatore Paste, it's 1997 Clos du Bols Pinot Noir.

Chicken or Veal Picatta cells for 1998 Banfi Pinot Grigio San

with the senson. Monthly specials add an additional appetizer, salad, pasta and three special-ties which can range from a comfy stuffed pork loin to French county-style frog legs.

Rusticn is divided into two diming options. The full-service bar side is the smoking area with 16 bar stools twhere appetitivers only may be ordered), five booths and two tables of eight. The non-smoking section has table sealing only, accommodating a total of 36. It's here that you can experience both rustic and European.

experience both rusts and European.

A mid-room service table holds a large bottle of 1998 Banfi Col di Sasso Cabernet Sauvignon-Sangiovese blend. Getting a glass of this delightful red wine (\$3.95 for eight ounces) is an honor system self pour. Just tell your waitperson how many glasses were taken. Wine freshness is insured by a nitrogen system. A compact list of two dozen wines offers other options in the beverage department.

Interaction among diners in this non-smoking room is very reminiscent of a dining experience in southern Europe, with-

out the smokers Europeans tend

to be.

Antipasti (Italian) is synonymous with Entrée (French) and translatable as appetizers in English. Among the most popular are Moules, farm-raised mussels steamed with white wine, garlie, and multi-color bell peppers.

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Melanzane is eggplant layered
with pemodoro sauce, ricotta,
mozzarella, and fontina cheese,
finished with fresh basil. Pepperoni e Salsiccia has hot Italian
sausage mixed with roasted peppers, onions, and tomatoes.

The signature soup is
Champignon avec Champagne,
made from a wine reduction that
is not as heavy as many mushroom cream soups. You may find
a Soup del Giorno, varying daily
and offered if time to make it
permits. permits.

That's rustic and a thoroughly

That's rustic and a thoroughly southern French, small family-owned restaurant expectation. Dried pastas are imported, but flat pastas are purchased fresh from Mana Muccli in Plymouth. Your choices abound here. Pessatora includes linguini, mus-sels, grilled tuna, littleneck

At your service: Curt Smith (left to right), Michael Thomas Jr. (chef proprietor), Sebastin Ponce and Andrew Sanderson present some of the items you'll find on the

clams, and shrimp in a spicy tomato sauce.

Since Judy Thomas (Michael's wife) is vegetarian, so is her favorite dish, lasagna, with nin layers, two sauces, fresh spinach, and five select cheeses.

You can catch Judy at the restaurant as hostess on Saturday evenings.

Michael's mom Pat Thomas assumes that role on Fridays.

Modestly-priced house specialties, served with fresh bread, as side of pasta, and a vegetable include both a chicken and veal

There's pizza. Small at \$6 is a child pleaser along with other classic pastas with sauces kids like.

like.

Desserts always include
Tiramisu, house-made Cannoli,
and Strawberries with Frangelico Gream.

Eleanor Heald is a Troy resident who writes about dining,
food and wine for the Observer &
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phone, mailbox 1864.

## WHAT'S COOKING

Send items for consideration in What's Cooking to Keely Wygo-nik, Entertainment Editor Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcroft, Livonia, MI 48150. Fog., (734) 591-7279 or e-mail kwygonik@oe. honecomm.net

MI Gurmet Gala — Present

"B Gourmet Gala — Presented by Crittenton Hospital, 5-8, p.m. Sunday, Nov. 7, Troy Marriott, 200 W. Big Beaver Road, Troy. Tickets \$75 (friend), \$125 (patron), \$175 (benefactor), call (248) 652-5346. Event features many of the area's finest chefs, restaurateurs and vintures. Proceeds will go toward the purchase of a handicapped-accessible passenger bus for the Older Persons Commission.

■ Celebrate Beaujolais. Nouveau — at Big Rock Chop & Brew House 246 S. Eton, Birm-

Ingham (248) 647-7774.

Between Nov. 10 and 20 beginning at 4 p.m. daily, enjey a four-course very French Blatre dinner. Each course accompanied by winc. The cost is \$60 per person. Until Nov. 18, the legal first date he 1999 Georges Duboeuf Beau-jolais Nouveau can be poured, the substitution is the lovely 1998 Moison Louis Jadot Beaujolais Village with the grilled salmon creps hors d'esuvre. Entree choices include Supreme de Volsille (breast of chicken) or Petite Filet Migmon aux Duxelle (samall grilled fillet stuffed with diced mushrooms) and served with a shallot and balsamic vincay reduction. Salad is sliced samoked duck breast, chilled foig gras paté and pistachios atop mixed greens. Fresh Bartlett pear stuffed with gorgonzola and

poached in white wine rounds out offerings in the dessert cate-

out offerings in the dessert category.

Save A Heart, A Celebration of Wine and Food, 630-9 p.m. Friday, Nov. 12 — at the Michigan Lengue, 911 North University at Fletcher, Ann Arbor, to benefit the Michigan Congenital Heart Center at G.S. Mott Children's Hospital. Over 300 different wines will be available for tasting, accompanied by Food from Ann Arbor's most popular restaurants. General admission tickets are \$50 per person (\$35 of which is tax deductible)

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and Tasting from Private Cellars benefactor tickets are \$180 (\$125 tax deductible). Call (734) 936-

tax deductible). Call (734) 9369134.

Epoch Restaurant
Group's Millennium Celebration — Guests dining at any of
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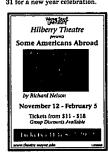
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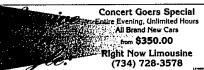
• Expansive Sweet Table

ice inclusive of coffee, tea, milk & soda.

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