

Fans follow La Shish to spacious new location

BY KEELY WYGNON
STAFF WRITER
kwygnon@ohiohomecomm.net

Joe Weber and his mother, Joann, were enjoying lunch and each other's company in a booth at the newly opened La Shish Livonia.

"It's very nice; we came here last week, too," said Weber, a La Shish fan for "at least five years." He's eaten at La Shish restaurants in Dearborn and Farmington Hills and was happy when one opened in Livonia.

"Quality, variety and freshness are the reasons he keeps coming back. The service is polite; it's always good," he said. Weber enjoyed the chicken shish kabob he ordered, and his mom, a Livonia resident, had her favorite, chicken shawarma with salad.

The opening of La Shish Livonia was a much anticipated event. "People kept knocking on the door asking us when we were going to open," said Charles Saad, vice president of operations.

"Every time we open a new location there's a half hour to an hour wait for dinner, 6-10 minutes for lunch," said Saad. "Weekends have been crazy. If you don't want to wait, order a carryout, or visit between 3-5 p.m. which is the slow, steady time."

The new Livonia La Shish is a beautiful restaurant, twice the size of the new Canton location. There's a mixture of comfortable booths and tables of four. Helping to create an Arabian Night atmosphere are custom arched windows, a gigantic brass chandelier, and fabric draped across the ceiling. Adding to the warm and welcoming feeling is a La Shish trademark, the scent of fresh-baked bread from the on-premise oven served warm at your table.

Executive Chef/senior vice president Jamil Eid is responsible for all of the food, and the chefs. "Before you taste the food with your mouth, you taste it with your eyes," said Eid explaining his philosophy about food. "Cooking is an art and I love cooking."

New items he recently added to the menu include Hummus with veggies, Mediterranean chicken wings, Shish Tawook (chicken kabob) with lemon and oregano, quail, and salmon fillet.

If you want to wow your

WHAT'S COOKING

■ **The Detroit Big Smoke**, 7-10 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 23, Detroit Marriott. \$160 per person. Over 4,000 cigar lovers attended "Cigar Aficionado" magazine's Las Vegas Big Smoke. Weekend and 2,500 enjoyed its New York Big Smoke. Now it's metro-Detroit's turn. This highly visual event is one where dedicated cigar lovers can indulge their passion and support OnPCure, a research organization seeking a cure for prostate cancer.

■ **The Big Smoke** features over 30 complimentary cigars per guest as well as food, wine, spirits and lots of fun strolling attendants. To order tickets: Fax to Detroit Big Smoke (212) 481-2523 or order online at www.cigaraficionado.com.

■ **Mardi Gras Brewery Dinner** — 1 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 27 at Bonfire Bistro & Brewery, 39560 Seven Mile Road, Northville. The cost is \$60 per person, all tables reserved, call (734) 735-4570.

■ **Chef David Platzer and brewer Ron Jeffries** are teaming up to present a five course meal and a pre-selected beer per course. The entree is Rotisserie Cornish Game Hen served with andouille sausage and crawfish corn bread stuffing over red and yellow pepper coulis.

■ **Mardi Gras Celebration at Schoolcraft** — celebrate the end of winter and the coming of spring in true New Orleans style at a gala Mardi Gras celebration 7 p.m. Saturday, March 4 in the Waterman Campus Center at Schoolcraft College. Tickets are \$35 a person, and may be ordered by calling (734) 482-4417. VISA, MasterCard or Discover cards are accepted. Proceeds support student scholarships. Join fellow revelers as they dine on a traditional New Orleans meal, and dance to music of Tom Saunders and the Detroit All-Stars.

The dinner menu includes andouille sausage with chicken gumbo, and sweet potatoes.

La Shish Livonia

Where: 37367 Newburgh, corner of Six Mile Road, Livonia, (734) 464-3200.
Open: 10 a.m. to 11 p.m. Sunday-Thursday; 10 a.m. to midnight Friday-Saturday.

Menu: Middle Eastern specialties including shish kabob, shish tawook, lamb chops, kibbe, hummus, tabbouli, spinach pie and grape leaves. Freshly squeezed juices, soups, salads and sandwiches. Combos and party trays also available.

Surprises: Some items you'll find on the menu, but wouldn't expect to are a Caesar turkey salad, chicken kabob with lemon-oregano, quail, whole red snapper, and salmon fillet.

Seating: 250 people, semi-private area available Sunday-Thursday for parties of 40-50 people. If you're planning a party, call the restaurant for information. They're flexible, and will make every effort to accommodate your request.

Reservations: Not accepted, but you can call ahead Monday-Thursday to have your name placed on a waiting list.

Credit Cards: All majors accepted.

Carry-out: All menu items.

Catering: Available, call La Shish headquarters, (313) 441-2900 for more information.

Other locations

■ **Canton** — 1699 Canton Center Road at Ford Road, (734) 983-9000

■ **Farmington Hills** — 37610 W. 12 Mile Road (at Halsted) (248) 553-0700

■ **West Bloomfield** — 6303 Orchard Lake Road, (248) 538-0800

■ **East Dearborn** — 12918 Michigan Ave., (313) 584-4477

■ **West Dearborn** — 22039 Michigan Ave., (313) 562-7200

friends, order the Flaming Tower — a spectacular Las Vegas-style showpiece of 12 skewers of shish kabob, shish tawook, kafta, shrimp, swordfish and vegetables, served with a large salad platter.

Future growth

Customers like the Webers are one of the reasons Talal K. Chahine decided to expand his growing chain of Lebanese restaurants to Livonia.

Eleven years ago, a sense of responsibility and pride in his homeland, prompted Chahine to open his first restaurant on Michigan Avenue in East Dearborn. He soon opened a second in West Dearborn, and then began following customers to other metropolitan Detroit suburbs.

In the nine years since he left a career in engineering to open his second La Shish restaurant, Chahine has been satisfying a growing hunger in metro Detroit for good Middle Eastern food.

"I trust my taste buds," he said. "I can't be steering the public wrong."

Now, as he approaches 400 employees, Chahine looks to the future, and "Inshallah" (God willing) to more opportunities to expand his trademark "La Shish," which translated means "the skewer."

"If I can humbly state, I always envisioned a chain of restaurants," he said. Chahine has two potential growth patterns in mind: Entering franchise agreements with people in other states, and developing a new line of restaurants, La Shish Express, that would offer quick, top quality, healthy, value-oriented meals to go. He's actively looking for sites, and plans to open La Shish Express in the near future. "I have great hope and expectations for La Shish Express," he said. "Fast food doesn't have to be unhealthy."



START PHOTO BY MATTHEW TAYLOR
Middle Eastern delights: La Shish executive chef/senior vice president Jamil Eid (left) and Charles Saad, vice president of operations, present some of the items you'll find on the menu at the new La Shish Livonia, and other La Shish locations. The Flaming Tower, (center) is a spectacular display of 12 skewers of shish kabob, shish tawook, kafta, shrimp, swordfish, and vegetables.

More Middle Eastern restaurants

If you enjoy Middle Eastern cuisine, here are some other restaurants to try in your hometown.

■ **Anita's Kitchen** — 31005 Orchard Lake Road, Farmington Hills, (248) 855-4150. Open 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Sunday-Thursday; 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. Friday-Saturday.

■ **Bushel's Cafe** — 985 N. Mill, Plymouth, (734) 464-9404. Open 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday-Friday; 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday.

■ **Cleopatra's** — 7888 N. Wayne Road, Westland, (734) 427-2100. Open 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday-Thursday; 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Friday; noon to 10 p.m. Saturday, and noon to 10 p.m. Sunday.

■ **Pine Land** — two locations, 8207 Middlebelt, Westland, (734) 421-4084; and 33320 Farmington Road, (at 12 Mile), Farmington Hills, (248) 324-1163. Open 9 a.m. to 11 p.m. Monday-Thursday; 9 a.m. to midnight Friday-Saturday.

■ **Panini Cafe and Grill** — 42087 Ford, Canton, (734) 981-7000. Open 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday-Saturday. Closed Sunday.

If we missed one of your favorite Middle Eastern restaurants, send a note attention Keely Wygnon, assistant managing editor Observer Features, via e-mail, fax (734) 591-7279, or to the Observer Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150, and we'll share the information with our readers next week.

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