

A taste of Nepal awaits the adventurous in Farmington

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You don't have to climb Mt. Everest to enjoy a taste of Nepal. But you do have to be careful not to drive past the Everest Express, a small, mostly take-out restaurant off Orchard Lake Road in Farmington that specializes in Nepalese and Middle Eastern cuisine.

What is Nepalese food? In one word, delicious. In two words, deliciously healthy. No salt, no saturated fat, no starchy fillers. The herbs, spices and fresh ingredients do all the work. It's also high in protein.

Don't expect fast food

Owners Nedal Gorges and Rocky Poudel of West Bloomfield are enthusiastic hosts. Be prepared for both a geography and culinary lesson when you visit. And be prepared to wait just a bit. It's worth it. Sit back and enjoy the good smells coming from the kitchen.

"Don't expect fast food because I make everything from scratch. My food takes time," said Poudel, who does all the cooking.

I never tasted a "momo" before, but the chicken stuffed Everest Momos - steamed dumplings - that arrived on a platter with rice and a tasty tomato sauce - seasoned with lemon juice and cilantro tasted as good as it

looked. And the Chara-Ko-Chow-Chow, noodles and mixed vegetables, yielded up its individual tastes of garlic, ginger and cilantro. Again, delicious.

I also shared two different soups with Bill Bresler, the Farmington Observer photographer. One was a mixed lentil soup, which was surprisingly mild, and the other was a more robust vegetable. Poudel quickly pointed out that he uses no soup bases and no prepared broths. A few spoonfuls told us that.

To say that Gorges, who's originally from Iraq, and Poudel, who came from Nepal a dozen years ago with just \$50 in his pocket, are passionate about their Nepalese food is an understatement. Their business partnership, a real mutual admiration society, came about when Poudel cooked Gorges a meal soon after they met.

"He started cooking for me, and I said this is so delicious. The next day I said I'll make my food. But I started craving his food. He made me a different dish every day. I swear, I now eat about six times a day. In my country, we only have three meals," said Gorges.

Poudel is no novice to the restaurant business. He's worked for several hotel chains, including the Sheraton Everest in Nepal, and previously owned the New Downtown Cafe in Farm-

Everest Express Nepal & Middle Eastern Cuisine
Where: 23331 Orchard Lake Road, about 1/2 mile north of Grand River (in an unmarked mall on the west side of the street), Farmington, (248) 474-8024
Menu: Mostly Nepalese. Lots of vegetable, chicken, lamb and noodle entrées and rice specialties \$6.95-\$9.95; appetizers and salads \$2.95-\$5.95; lunch specials \$3.50-\$5.99.
Atmosphere: Spacious, mostly take-out. Six tables eat-in. Great hospitality.
Hours: 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Monday-Saturday; noon to 9 p.m. Sunday.
Credit Cards: All major cards

ington several years ago. He credits Gorges with helping him realize his dream of opening a Nepalese restaurant.

"Nedal is the one who gave me the encouragement," he said.

Mountain food

Nepalese food has its origins in that country's mountainous terrain. It is a food for a people used to trekking long distances at high altitudes. "Nepalese food is very healthy. When you climb a mountain, you need lots of protein for endurance and very little salt. You can't be carrying around lots of heavy water bottles," said Gorges.

Poudel, who has the heart of a poet, strove for the right words to describe his cuisine. "It's easy to digest, and at the same time, when you put the flavor in your mouth, it will never go away. It will make you more hungry. You will want more."

He's right. After a few bites, I decided the taste was neither Indian nor Oriental. Was it a hybrid? Yes...well, not quite. It was Nepalese, and I wanted more.

Besides the Momos and Chow-Chow, another popular menu item is the Himalayan Chili, made with chicken or lamb, green peppers, onions, tomatoes, chili, but no beans. "Chili doesn't have beans," said Poudel. If you want it on the hotter side, just ask. Poudel will add a fresh chili to raise the temperature of any of his dishes.

Poudel's Safari Kozi, roasted lamb with fried onions and spices, is one of Gorges' favorites. "He adds this and he adds that. I can't even eat my lamb chops anymore," she said.

If you truly are adventurous, Poudel suggests you try the Tama-Bodi-Tarakrie - black-eyed beans with potatoes, bam-



STAFF PHOTO BY BOB BARKER

Enthusiastic hosts:
Nedal Gorges (left) and Rocky Poudel get ready to serve a platter of the flavorful Chara-Ko-Chow-Chow, mixed vegetables with chicken and noodles.

boo shoots, herbs and spices. "It's very healthy and totally different than any other taste you've ever had," he said.

Among all the Nepalese appetizers, salads, soups and entrées, there is a smattering of Middle Eastern offerings. Hommus lovers will find it on the menu, along with tabbouleh and Chicken Shawarma. The lamb kabobs, however, are cooked Nepalese style in a tandoori oven.

A dream

Everest Express is a small, no-frills restaurant with a big heart, thanks to the hospitality and ambition of Gorges and Poudel.

"I arrived here with just \$50 and a lot of confidence. I'll always keep my confidence," said Poudel as testimony that he both pursues dreams and makes them come true.

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