

DINING

# Larco's Grill puts new spin on eating out Italian style

By ELEANOR HEALD  
SPECIAL WRITER

Enter the West Bloomfield location of the new Larco's Italian Grill. A million dollar renovation has stripped any memory of a Memphis Smoke followed by a Flying Fish that occupied the building in recent years.

A classy bar/lounge with high-top tables crafted from oak and maple in a geometric design are mirrored in the dining room on over-sized tables and comfortable booths. Well-placed interior walls and carpeted floors reduce noise when the restaurant goes full tilt on weekends. The complete menu is available in the lounge where smoking is permitted.

Exuberant wall art by local artist Jim Chatelein creates a mysterious effect. New works of gouache on paper, complete with drips and underlying pencil drawings establish a palette of astonishing colors in sharp contrast to the principal decor. Chatelein's works on exhibit at Larco's are available for sale through Revolution gallery in Ferndale.

On the menu

Shrimp Larco is a 50-year flagship appetizer. Lightly-breaded shrimp are flash fried then sautéed in a lemon, white wine and garlic sauce. For crispiness, flatbread pizza are pan-fried in olive oil then topped. For a true taste of Italy in the style of a pizza bianco, try the house-dried



STAFF PHOTO BY MELANIE MAXWELL

For you: Chef Zog Vulaj presents tuna pasta with tomato, and grilled sea bass with vegetable medley, two of the dishes you'll find on the menu at Larco's Italian Grill.

tomatoes, blended cheeses with a chiffonade of fresh basil topping. Larco's minestrone is legendary as is the house salad dressing with its proprietary blend of spices. For a main course, the Tenderloin drizzled with Bernet sauce accompanied by five lobster-stuffed ravioli with a red pepper vodka sauce, and asparagus plate garnish is unbeatable at \$19. It comes with either soup or salad.

All fillets, six, eight or 10-ounce, are accompanied by a side of Larco's fabulous Zip Sauce. While there's no specific kids' menu, there's plenty for children to enjoy like pizza, meatball grinder or a half-order of pasta. Tray-presented desserts include house made (by a family

member) spumoni, lemon ice and vanilla ice cream. Chocolate-covered Cannoli, classic custard-style Zuppa Inglese, Tiramisu and a Berry Cobbler with blackberries, blueberries, raspberries and strawberries are among other choices.

For your dining pleasure  
Mike Larco, son of founder

Peter Larco, who opened the first Larco's on Six Mile Road in Detroit, is the family member overseeing Larco's Grill. Since age 13, he has worked in his father's restaurant and then at his aunt's restaurant Lelli's before moving to the Troy location at 645 E. Big Beaver.

"West Bloomfield is an ideal second location for the Larco family," he noted. "We can serve residents in the neighborhood, but with our central location, we can attract diners from suburbs east and west of us. We saw a need for a classic Italian restaurant and hope to fill that niche."

Chef Zog Vulaj has been associated with a number of Italian restaurants in the area, including Larco's in Troy. Now, as executive chef at 30 years old he's enjoying kitchen life more than ever.

"Italian food has a sexy appeal," he said.

"From the fresh herbs and seasonal vegetables to butchering different fish and cuts of meat, there's always a challenge. Making the sauces from scratch is a pleasure with the unusual combination of reductions, stocks and fresh ingredients that make them delicious."

The relaxed ambiance and menu concept at Larco's Italian Grill has put a New Age spin on "eating out Italian-style" in metro-Detroit.

Eleanor Heald is a Troy resident who writes about dining.

food, wine and spirits for the Observer & Eccentric! Newspapers. To leave her a voice mail message, dial (734) 953-2047 on a touch-tone phone, mailbox 1864#.

**Larco's Italian Grill**  
Where: 6480 Orchard Lake, at Maple, West Bloomfield (248) 626-6969

Open: Dinner only, 4:30 p.m.-10 p.m., Monday-Thursday, until midnight on Friday and Saturday and 3:30-9 p.m., Sunday

Menu: Italian Classics plus new attention to lighter dishes like salads, panini, pasta orders and individual flatbread pizzas

Cost: Pastas with soup or salad \$15. Many entree classics with soup or salad, side of pasta, potato or vegetable under \$20

Reservations: Not accepted

**Larco's Uncorked**

Wine and Italian food are a match made in heaven. Chef Zog Vulaj recommends:

■ 1999 Poggio Alle Gasse Sauvignon Blanc with Potato Encrusted Whitefish

■ 1998 Michele Chiarlo Barbera d'Asti correct spelling and Tenderloin Siciliano

■ 2000 Antinori Orvieto and Chicken with wild mushrooms, asparagus, tri-colored tortellini and roasted chicken sauce

CHALKBOARD SPECIALS

Send information for consideration in Chalkboard Specials to Kelly Wygonik, Assistant Managing Editor of Features, Observer Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150, fax (734) 591-7279 or e-mail (send as text file) kwygonik@aol.com/homecomm.net

ANNIVERSARY

Steve's Family Dining, 40360 Five Mile Road, West Hagg-

er, (734) 420-0368, is celebrating its fifth anniversary this week. The family-style restaurant offers a variety of home-cooked dishes, and Polish entrees such as pierogi, stuffed cabbage, kielbasa with sauerkraut, city chicken, and potato pancakes. Open for breakfast, lunch and dinner, 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday-Saturday, 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. Sunday. Catering available, call for more

information.

JUST OPENED

Batz Bakery - Middle Eastern, Mediterranean, and American Foods, 23838 Joy Road, east of Telegraph. Menu includes spinach and cheese pie, sandwiches, salads, vegetarian grape leaves, hummus and baba ghanouj. Open 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday-Friday, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Saturday-Sunday. Call (313) 631-

3770 for information.

DETROIT 300TH BIRTHDAY FEAST

Presented by Matt Prentice's Unique Restaurant Corp. 7 p.m. Thursday-Friday, Aug. 9-10 at Duet, 3663 Woodward Ave., at Orchestra Place, Detroit. The menu incorporates one course from four Detroit dining establishments - The London Chop House, 3663 Woodward Ave., at Orchard Place, Detroit. The menu incorporates one course from four Detroit dining establishments - The London Chop House, 3663 Woodward Ave., at Orchard Place, Detroit.

The cost is \$42.95 per person, not including tax or gratuity. Master Sommelier Madeline Triffin will offer a special wine package at an additional price. Reservations are required, call (313) 831-3838.

CALIFORNIA PIZZA

Home of a wide selection of hearty baked pizzas, pastas, salads, soups and sandwiches recently opened its second Michi-

gan restaurant at Briarwood Mall in Ann Arbor, (between Sears and Hudson's). Restaurant hours are 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Monday-Thursday, 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Friday-Saturday, 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. Sunday. There is seating for 142 people.

California Pizza also operates a restaurant at the Somerset Collection in Troy. For more information, visit www.CPK.com

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