

DINING

Get your fill at Loving Spoonful

BY CHRISTINA PUOCO
STAFF WRITER

A Schoolcraft College graduate, Shawn Loving had his mind set on combining his cooking skills with the ability to give back to the community.

After nine years away from Michigan, he has returned to do just that. On Tuesday, Sept. 18, Loving opened Loving Spoonful in Farmington Hills, his fifth restaurant venture and first in Michigan.

Loving recruited his employees through Schoolcraft and his other alma mater, Golightly Vocational School in Detroit.

"Largely because I was born and raised on the east side of Detroit, I'm a big fan of cultural progression here and a big fan of Schoolcraft College, which is my alma mater."

Located in the former Copper Creek restaurant, Loving Spoonful offers eclectic dishes such as rye and pistachio-encrusted whitefish, herb and garlic pork tenderloin and napoleon potato tower.

Loving prides himself on keeping up with adventurous ingredients.

"I can take a very light herb and mix it with a strong fish and have it balance. It challenges you to be able to (accomplish) what the customer needs," said Loving, who lives in Wixom.

"I'm intrigued by quinoa, a new grain that's being used a lot. I like the fact that guests ask me (about) the way it is being paired with a lamb dish. The restaurant is involved that way."

He takes quinoa and blends it in lamb trilogy: grilled loin chops, roasted lamb sausage and Moroccan spiced lamb patty.

In keeping with his goal of maintaining customers' satisfaction, Loving prints his menus in house, allowing him to frequently change available dishes.

"Having tasty food, not having food that is pretentious or not understandable (is the goal). It's very important that the customers understand what they're eating. These days, it's an honor to have people come into your restaurant."

Cooking has long been an important part of Loving's family. He learned to cook from his mother, whom he considers "a home chef," and his father, a dietitian at a hospital.



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL DREXLER

By the spoonful: Chef Shawn Loving serves up the restaurant's fried red tomato appetizer.

"I loved Thanksgiving and Christmas time when I could watch my friends and family smile and eat and do all those things," Loving said.

Schoolcraft College gave him the opportunity to study and compete abroad. His travels have taken him to Bangkok and Singapore, among other places.

"As a chef, one of the most important things is to travel and share ideas with other chefs," Loving explained.

He honed his craft at Chef Keith Famie's former Royal Oak venture, Les Auteurs, as well as the Ponchartraine. Nine years ago he left Michigan to work for at Disney World in Orlando, Fla., where he opened the Garden Grill at Epcot Center's The Land. There vegetables and herbs are grown hydroponically (in a nutrient solution rather than soil). He aided a cultural task force in EuroDisney and opened two Race Rock Cafés, one in Orlando and the others in Las Vegas, Nev. His fourth restaurant venture is Fountainview Espresso.

Loving hadn't necessarily planned on opening a restaurant in Michigan. While he was searching for locations for his new venture, metro Detroit made the most sense.

"I was trying to find a location. We looked at Chicago, New York, cities with all the conventions of bigger cities. There was a lot of talk about how this area could use another 'destination' restaurant location," he said.

A building off the ninth hole of Farmington Hills' Copper Creek Golf Course was a prime location. Loving Spoonful's spacious dining room and oversized win-

Loving Spoonful
Where: 27925 Golf Pointe Boulevard, Farmington Hills. (248) 489-9400

Open: 11:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. and 5-10 p.m. Mondays-Thursdays; 11:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. and 5-11 p.m. Fridays; 5-11 p.m. Saturdays; 4-9 p.m. Sundays. Reservations recommended.

Menu: Eclectic, with an emphasis on new trends in cooking.

Cost: Lunch: \$5-\$6.95 for appetizers; \$4.50-\$8 salads; \$8.25-\$9 sandwiches; \$8.25-\$11.50 "Spoonful Specialties"; \$4-\$5.75 desserts; Dinner: \$7-\$8.50 appetizers; \$4.50-\$6 salads; \$6-\$8 soups and broths; \$15-\$27.50 mains; courses; \$5.50-\$7 desserts. All major credit cards accepted.

dows overlook the course. The airy room spills into a two-level deck peppered with glass-top patio tables and beige chairs.

He dubs it "a very casual dining experience where the true emphasis of the restaurant is the food."

With the opening of Loving Spoonful, Loving himself is becoming a mentor. The title "chef" almost makes him laugh. He explained that he's humble, and frequently learns from his staff.

"I always second guess myself. ... I've gone back to Schoolcraft and to have (students) call me 'chef,' I don't know how to take that," he said with a smile.

His modesty goes along with the motto of Loving Spoonful, which he explained.

"It's cuisine from the heart. Food that's simple and tastes very good."

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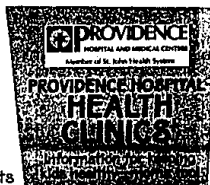
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