

DINING

Familiarity makes Sandtraps on 5 a cozy choice for dining

By MIKE MURPHY
SPECIAL WRITER

Dining at Sandtraps on 5 is akin to paying a visit to old friends, even if you don't know them yet.

The atmosphere is warm and cozy, light jazz and conversation fills the air, and chef and restaurant owner George Subu and his son Johnny, who manages the restaurant, tour the tables regularly to make sure customers are happy.

Happy customers are important to the Subus, who opened Sandtraps 10 months ago after extensively remodeling the location, a plantation-style clubhouse that overlooks Idyl Wyld golf course on Five Mile.

The remodeling has not only been related to the restaurant's interior. The Subus are also working on reversing the flow of the location, which has housed a number of not-so-successful

restaurants in the past.

According to George Subu, the reversal of fortune is well underway.

"I feel this way," Subu said. "This is Livonia's best kept secret."

Sandtraps is Subu's first venture into the restaurant business as an owner. Born in Yugoslavia and of Rumanian descent, Subu has worked in restaurants all of his adult life.

He started cooking at a truck stop before becoming an apprentice chef at the Chamberlin in Dearborn. He sharpened his talents as a chef at the Dearborn Inn before he settled for 18 years at Topper's in Dearborn.

Johnny Subu was steeped in the restaurant business at Topper's, where he started as a busboy at the age of 15 and became a bartender. He was later hired as restaurant manager at Ginopolis Parthenon in Plymouth Township.

After chalking up all those years of experience, the Subus decided to strike out on their own.

"I worked all my life for someone else," Subu said. "It was time for me to put in some time for myself and my sons."

In contrast to corporate chain restaurants, Sandtraps is truly a family-operated restaurant where homemade and fresh food is served.

George, another of Subu's sons, works in the kitchen. So does Subu's mother, Vicki.

"Grandma makes all the bread fresh daily," Subu said.

Soups are also prepared daily, and Sandtraps specializes in a number of fresh seafood dishes, which are made available dependent on the market.

Seafood specialties on the menu include marinated pesto salmon and planked whitefish. But Sandtraps is not an ordinary

family restaurant, Johnny Subu said.

"What we strive for is to become one of the best," he said. "We want to become a new landmark in the city."

Entrees at Sandtraps cover a broad spectrum.

Menu items such as steaks and chops, chicken and veal, seafood, sandwiches and vegetarian stir fry dishes vie for the diner's attention, as does a healthy selection of daily lunch and evening specials.

The restaurant's desert menu includes Snicker's pie, tiramisu, New York cheese cake, apple pie ala mode and a homemade rice pudding, which served warm and with cinnamon on top is worth saving room for.

"We have a different type of menu than most people do," said Johnny Subu, who recommends that customers try the almond-

crusted pickerel when its available. "We pay attention to detail."

On a recent Friday, specials included the pickerel, all-you-can-eat fish & chips, prime rib of beef and a flavorful chicken Tosca topped with Alfredo sauce.

In keeping with Friday traditions, the Subus served up a zesty Manhattan clam chowder, chockful of clams and rich in spices.

According to Subu, the near-full dining room was made up of a mixture of customers, some who made their way to the new restaurant after getting to know Subu in Dearborn.

Others were from the Livonia area but the smiling chef greeted them as if they were old friends just the same.

Livonians Gary Dixon and Ruth Olsen said they make it a point to dine at Sandtraps at least once a week. Olsen described the restaurant like it

Sandtraps on 5
Where: 35780 Five Mile Road, Livonia, (734)464-5555
Open: 4-11 p.m. Mondays; 11 a.m.-11 p.m. Tuesday through Friday; noon-11 p.m. Saturday
Seating: 140, with banquet facilities for up to 200
Menu: A wide variety, with lunch entrees ranging from \$4.95 to \$10, dinner entrees range from \$8.95 to \$14.95 to \$23.95
Credit: Accepts all major credit cards.

was a personal treasure, but one she was more than willing to share.

Dixon warned against leaving without trying the calamari.

"We love the food and we come here every Friday night," Olsen said. "We wouldn't go anywhere else. They're just like family."

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