

Carrabba's emphasizes personal service and fresh foods

BY JOANNE MALUSZEWSKI
CORRESPONDENT

Walk in, feel the warmth of the wood-burning pizza oven and you'll be sure to make yourself at home at Carrabba's Italian Grill.

"We still have people come in and tell us they didn't know we were here," said Gary Harchelroad, managing partner of the new Canton restaurant.

The eatery, which opened late last year, has a great view of I-275, but patrons might have a tough time finding it with its proximity to the freeway. Look for the huge Lifetime Fitness facility on the east side of Haggerty, south of Ford Road, and Carrabba's is between that and the Extended Stay America motel.

This summer, you will surely recognize the eatery by its lush rooftop garden, complete with evergreens and other indigenous vegetation.

"We offer a Tuscan landscape even in Michigan," said Andi Jacobs, marketing vice president. "We hired an architect who is known for including landscaping in the architecture."

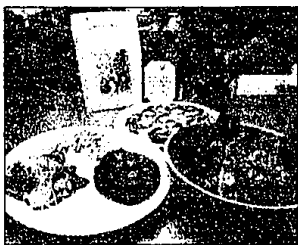
GOOD TASTES

The warm ambience of Carrabba's wood and tile decor is sure to draw in patrons. But it's the freshly made cuisine that is bound to develop repeat business for the casual, family restaurant.

The 6,300-square-foot eatery offers seating for more than 200 patrons, and a staff of 80. Personal, family service is a Carrabba's theme, with staff



Josh West shows off a Margherita pizza fresh out of the stone oven at Carrabba's.



PHOTOS BY PAUL HIRSCHBAUM | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER
A filet with a side of zucchini and fettuccine Alfredo, Pescatore (mussels, shrimp and scallops with marinara over linguini) and a Margherita pizza are among the offerings at Carrabba's.

CARRABBA'S ITALIAN GRILL

Where: 1900 N. Haggerty Road, Canton, (734) 844-7400;
4345 West Oaks Drive, Novi, (248) 735-0400

Open:
4-10 p.m. Monday-Thursday,
4-11 p.m. Friday, 3-11 p.m. Saturday and 1-9 p.m. Sunday

Credit cards:
All majors accepted.

Web site: www.carrabbas.com

serving sections with only two-three tables each.

When you go to Carrabba's, keep this in mind: Italian cuisine is not limited to spaghetti. Developed by Johnny Carrabba and his uncle, Damian Mandola, members of one of Houston's largest culinary families, Carrabba's specialty is meat.

"Johnny and Damian incorporated grilling as an essential part of the menu. Grilling is very Italian. The family is Sicilian. Grilling is about that area of Italy," Jacobs said.

If you think the Carrabba and Mandola names are familiar, you're right. They host the Italian cooking show, "Cucina Amore" on PBS. A cookbook, "Clao 'Tali," will be in bookstores this year.

From the wood-burning grill come specialties such as filet mignon, chicken gratella - baked with olive oil and herbs - chicken or sirloin marsala,

both which feature the florio marsala wine sauce. Other grilled specialties are pollo rosa maria, a chicken breast stuffed with fontina cheese and prosciutto, and spiedino di mare, shrimp and sea scallops coated with Italian breadcrumbs.

Grilled entrees range from \$12.45 to \$18.99 for the filet mignon, and \$15.99 for the fish of the day that is grilled and completed with a special sauce.

A large, open kitchen allows patrons to watch the creation of their meals. Large pots of pasta cook at the pasta bar. The pizza bar - on the other side of the kitchen - also serves as entertainment.

"Kids like to sit here and see them (chefs) make the pizzas," Harchelroad said.

Pasta specialties range from pasta Carrabba, which is fettuccine alfredo tossed with grilled chicken, sauteed mush-

rooms and peas for \$11.99 to pasta weesie, shrimp sauteed in a garlic, lemon butter and wine sauce for \$13.99, and mezzaluna, which are delicate half-moon-shaped ravioli filled with chicken, ricotta and spinach in a tomato cream sauce for \$10.49.

DINNER'S SPECIAL

Carrabba's is not open for lunch. And there is a reason.

"Everything is made fresh. It is too hard to do it for lunch. It would take away from the quality of the product," Harchelroad said.

While a takeout venue may not set Carrabba's apart, the eatery, however, does one better with its car side service. Call in your order, tell the staff member what type of car you're driving, and when you arrive at the restaurant, your order is brought to you.

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