

DINING

Marco's reflects Italian family traditions

BY ELEANOR AND RAY HEALD
SPECIAL WRITERS

For nearly eight years, downtown Farmington's Marco's restaurant has treated diners like guests in chef and owner Marco Conte's home. His maternal roots extend from Ponza, Italy, a small island in the Mediterranean. His father's city is Gaeta, a Mediterranean seaport town about two and one-half hours south of Rome. To honor his heritage, Marco has named an antipasto, Spiedini alla Ponza and a pasta, Linguine alla Gaeta. Respect for Italian family traditions runs deep and reflects the essence of this popular dining spot.

The always casually dressed 32-year-old Marco dons his apron in the kitchen as he helps prepare the cooked-to-order Italian specialties. During meal hours, he pulls off his apron on a number of times to give tableside greeting couples, families with children and friends enjoying a meal out together. Frequent diners enter and depart with "Ciao, Marco!"

Marco grew up in Farmington and now lives in a downtown Farmington older home, most of which he restored himself. "I believe in an owner-on-premises restaurant," the affable and gregarious Marco maintained, "I live here. It's my life and my love. I love people and I'm here for everyone because basically I like to both cook and entertain."

Enthusiased about his home town, Marco chose it as the location of his restaurant. Set back off the road in a park-like atmosphere, it is downtown yet reminds Marco of the open fields in the Farmington of his childhood.

A contemporary, home-like atmosphere pervades the two dining rooms, seating a total of 85. It is this size that allows personal service. A smoking room is attached to the bar. In warm

Marco's
Where: 32758 Grand River (in Village Commons Mall), downtown Farmington (810) 477-7777.

Hours: Lunch, Monday to Friday 11:30 a.m.-3 p.m.; dinner Monday to Thursday 5-10 p.m.; Friday 5-11 p.m.; Saturday 4:30-11 p.m.

Menu: Eclectic collection of classic Italian with innovative dishes and specials that are more "novels" (new). Pastas are served with freshly baked bread and green salad. Additionally, main courses include a side dish of pasta, vegetable and potato.

Meatless options: Many Highlights: Intimate, comfortable, relaxed atmosphere. Tony Balog entertains with violin and guitar music Wednesdays from 6:30-9:30 p.m.; Fridays from 7:30-10:30 p.m.; the Mike Millman Trio plays light jazz.

Handicap access: wide front door, no steps.

Cost: Antipasti (appetizers) \$4-8; zuppa (soup) \$2-4; pastas \$10-16; Piatti della Casa (main dishes) \$13-24. Dessert selections from a tray including tiramisu \$3-5.50.

Reservations: recommended, but necessary on weekends.

Parking: ample self-park.

Credit cards: all majors accepted.

months, dining is available on an adjacent patio. The non-smoking section has a number of breaks in the floor design to afford both intimate tables and bigger tops for group dining. Dark hunter green walls are soothing. Table settings with comfortable chairs are brightened with white table cloths, candles and fresh flowers. Perfectly placed recessed ceiling

lamps create the desired mood and accent wall artwork Marco purchased from Michigan artists at the Ann Arbor Art Fair. "My parents call me the child who was born on the kitchen counter," Marco continued. His parents Ann and Enzo Conte owned Rina's restaurant in Detroit. They sold it to help Marco open in Farmington. But they have not totally retired. Ann is frequently found helping out behind the bar while Enzo works in the kitchen.

When Marco recalls the mentors in his life that led him to the restaurant business, he first cites Paul Terzamo, who supervised his first formal cooking at Southwest Oakland Vocational Education Center. Today, Terzamo manages the Piedmontese Club on Nine Mile Road in Farmington. His next mentor whom he said "molded him into a duplicate of herself" is his aunt Rina Toton, owner of Cafe Cortina in Farmington Hills. "I worked for her for 10 years," Marco said. "She taught me how not to focus on the little things in life, but view the big picture." His third influence was his grandmother who "held me in her arms while she stirred the pasta." Rina Toton also trained 29-year-old Steven Kedzierski of Farmington Hills who has served as Marco's chef since it opened.

Dr. Allan Ash, recently-retired Farmington Hills orthodontist, and his wife Marilyn have been coming to the restaurant since its debut. "The food is excellent and the atmosphere is always congenial," Marilyn said. Dr. Ash added, "Consistently good. We've never had a bad meal. Everything is fresh and full of the right flavors." From the menu, the Ashes chose their favorites: Calamari Fritti (lightly



Staff photo by SHARON LESTER. Welcoming guests: The always casually dressed 32-year-old Marco Conte, chef/owner of Marco's, treats diners like guests his home.

seasoned sauteed squid) as an appetizer; Linguine Marinara con le Vongole (linguine with fresh tomato sauce and baby clams) for a pasta dish. An entree, they recommended Vitello Piccante con Carciofini e Funghi (veal sauteed with artichoke hearts, mushrooms, white wine, garlic and lemon); Petto di Follo Francese (chicken breast sauteed with mushrooms, onions, lemon and white wine); and Riolatini di Molazzano (eggplant rolled with mozzarella cheese and baked with fresh tomato

sauce). This latter is a popular meatless selection. Mark Haines, a Livonia graphic designer, likes to eat at the bar when he's alone, but he frequently has family events at Marco's and entertains clients there often. He also recommended the Calamari Fritti. "It's the best," he maintained. "While all the food is excellent, you can't beat Lambetta di Vitello alla Griglia (char-grilled center cut veal chop served with seasoned roasted peppers) and a glass of cabernet sauvignon."

While this is Haines' wine choice, diners have a broad selection of California and Italian wines, both white and red, from which to choose. Italian wine af-

icionados will recognize some big names (with fair prices) such as Bruno Giacosa, Lungarotti, Castello Banfi, Castello di Gabbiano and Ruffino. Several premium wines are poured by the glass. "Almost everyone orders wine here," Marco noted.

A small, well-stocked bar offers a number of sherries, ports and other aperitifs. Waiter Lawrence Marble won the Opal Nero (Black Sambuca) award for his drink creation named Marco's Jagged Edge, a combination of Black Sambuca, espresso and rum. Marble and other experienced, friendly, courteous and well-trained waitstaff have worked at Marco's for many years.

FINE LINE FEATURES PRESENTS
5 GOLDEN GLOBE NOMINATIONS
Including
BEST PICTURE
BEST ACTOR — GEOFFREY RUSH
"AN UTTERLY EXTRAORDINARY TRUE STORY... IT'S SCRAPPY, SEXY, TOUCHING AND FUN."
—*JOEL SIEGEL, GOOD MORNING AMERICA*
"SHINE IS A GREAT FILM."
—*JOEL SIEGEL, GOOD MORNING AMERICA*

STARTS CHRISTMAS DAY, DECEMBER 25TH
AMC WOODS 6 • BIRMINGHAM 8 • SHOWCASE PONTIAC
SHOWCASE WESTLAND • STAR GRAND AT 15 MILE • STAR JOHN RAY AT 11 MILE
STAR ROCHSTER • STAR WINN FAIRLAIN • NO PASSES OR COUPONS ACCEPTED
Visit the Fine Line Features web site at <http://www.fll.com>

GIVE THE GIFT OF FINE FOOD AND GOOD TASTE THIS HOLIDAY SEASON
THE CAPITAL GRILL & B.B.Q.
2800 WEST BIG BEAVER ROAD, TROY, MI (810) 649-5300
CORPORATE DISCOUNTS AVAILABLE FOR BULK PURCHASES.
CHESAPE BEHE • BOSTON • PROVIDENCE • WASHINGTON, D.C.

New Year's Eve At...
LAUREL MANOR
• Elegant Atmosphere • Hors D'oeuvres
• All Reserved Seating • Live Band
• Gourmet Dinner • Party Favors
• Midnight Buffet, Pizza & Subs, and Continental Breakfast
\$75 per person
Call for Tickets & Information
(313) 462-0770
Holiday Party Trays, Pastries & Tortes Available at: The Laurel Deli & Pastry Shop 39000 Schoolcraft Road • Livonia 953-0700
New Years Eve Dinner
Fonte D Amore Restaurant
32030 Plymouth Rd. Livonia • 422-0770

TIME MAGAZINE says:
"YOU MUST SEE 'EVITA'!"
Richard Gere
5 GOLDEN GLOBE NOMINATIONS
BEST PICTURE
"IT'S GORGEOUS! IT'S EPIC! IT'S SPECTACULAR!"
—*DAVID LEE*
"TWO THUMBS UP!"
—*DAVID LEE*
MADONNA • ANTONIO BANDERAS • JONATHAN LYNN
EVITA
STARTS WEDNESDAY JANUARY 1 EXCLUSIVELY
Uptown Theatre
Advance tickets on sale now at the Theatre Box Office
SHOWTIMES: 7:00, 9:00 & 9:50pm
Tickets for the Theatre Box Office

HAVE A ROUNDERFUL HOLIDAY SEASON!
AMERICANAS 123 • AMG BIRMGHAM 10 • AMG EASTLAND 25
AMG LAUREL 10 • AMG SOUTHFIELD 10 • AMG SOUTHWEST 10
AMG WOODS 6 • BIRMINGHAM 8 • PLYMOUTH 10
SHOWCASE WOODS 6 • SHOWCASE PONTIAC 8 • SHOWCASE WESTLAND 8
STAR GRAND AT 15 MILE • STAR JOHN RAY AT 11 MILE
STAR ROCHSTER • STAR WINN FAIRLAIN • NO PASSES OR COUPONS ACCEPTED
CALL 810 777-7777 • 212 G.O. FILMS • CHECK DIRECTORY FOR SHOWTIMES

TWO THUMBS UP!
"DENZEL WASHINGTON AND WHITNEY HOUSTON LIGHT UP THE SCREEN"
—*JOEL SIEGEL, GOOD MORNING AMERICA*
"THE PREACHER'S WIFE ENTERTAINS IN A WAY THAT FEW MODERN FILMS EVEN DARE TO ATTEMPT."
—*SEAN WILSON, USA TODAY*
"AN INSPIRATIONAL COMEDY, WHITNEY HOUSTON AND DENZEL WASHINGTON LOOK WONDERFUL TOGETHER."
—*JAMES MCKIN, NEW YORK TIMES*
denzel WASHINGTON whitney HOUSTON
The Preacher's Wife
AMERICANAS 123 • AMG BIRMGHAM 10 • AMG EASTLAND 25
AMG LAUREL 10 • AMG SOUTHFIELD 10 • AMG SOUTHWEST 10
AMG WOODS 6 • BIRMINGHAM 8 • PLYMOUTH 10
SHOWCASE WOODS 6 • SHOWCASE PONTIAC 8 • SHOWCASE WESTLAND 8
STAR GRAND AT 15 MILE • STAR JOHN RAY AT 11 MILE
STAR ROCHSTER • STAR WINN FAIRLAIN • NO PASSES OR COUPONS ACCEPTED
CALL 810 777-7777 • 212 G.O. FILMS • CHECK DIRECTORY FOR SHOWTIMES