

DINING

Sweet Lorraine's brings comfort, joy to Marriott

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A Laurel Park Place shopper wanders into the newly opened Sweet Lorraine's at the Livonia Marriott and asks, "Are you open yet?"

Shhh... don't tell anyone. They've been open nearly a month, and it's the best kept secret in Livonia.

Guests at the hotel have been "Sweet" on "Lorraine" since the restaurant opened in April. It's become their home away from home and a surprise discovery for shoppers, office workers, and people in the neighborhood who didn't know it moved in.

Lorraine Platman is meeting in a corner booth with her kitchen staff. Suddenly, she jumps up and goes to the kitchen. She emerges minutes later apologizing and explaining that she had to talk to one of the staff about the way a sandwich was served.

"It's a grilled sandwich. It's supposed to be golden brown and the cheese melted," she said.

Platman cares about food. That's one of the ingredients of her success. She's very hands-on, and she pushes her staff to excel.

"The people know how to cook, but they're working triple hard. They're working with fresh ingredients, and they're enthused," she said.

Executive Chef Clark DeKott, who grew up in Redford Township and studied culinary arts at Oakland Community College in Farmington Hills, agrees.

"We're working harder, but we're considerably more satisfied," he said. "We enjoy the food. It's challenging and satisfying. It has a global perspective. It's a very large menu. There are new recipes to learn. They're all complicated, but all are wonderful."

DeKott, who has worked for the Marriott for 10 years, com-

Sweet Lorraine's Café

Where: Marriott Hotel, 17100 N. Laurel Park Drive, off Six Mile Road next to Laurel Park Place, Livonia, (734) 953-7480.

Open: 6:30-11 a.m. breakfast menu and buffet; 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. lunch; 4-11 p.m. dinner, lounge open to midnight, Monday-Thursday; 4 p.m. to midnight Friday-Saturday, dinner; lounge open to 1 a.m. Weekend breakfast buffet 8 a.m. to noon Saturday; 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. Sunday.

Menu: World-beat cuisine with emphasis on fresh, seasonal ingredients from local purveyors Children's menu available.

Cost: Breakfast \$5-\$15, Lunch \$6-\$12; Dinner \$7-\$19.

Reservations: Recommended for parties of 6 or more; call ahead seating available.

Carryout: Available.

Credit Cards: All majors accepted.

Seats: 146; smoking allowed in the lounge area.

He prepares the orchestration of a meal to playing the piano. "You can play notes and read music, but you've got to get the melody down. It's the nuances, the taste, that make a product wonderful."

Consistency is also important. Repeat performances have to be as good as the first. Platman's recipes include notes on presentation, and she's a stickler for detail. "I want to be able to reproduce the same dish next year," she said.

Everything, even the bread and desserts, is made fresh daily. The menu reflects what's in season and changes accordingly. Duck was added as a regular item, along with "French Onion Steak Tenderloin" - Angus beef tenderloin served over garlic roasted croustons, caramelized onions and a French onion sauce, topped with melted mozzarella cheese.

You can get a sandwich, burger, main-dish salad, pasta, seafood or chicken. There are a number of vegetarian items, including the new Brie Portobello Melt. Specials and soups change daily. Cream of tomato soup is offered daily because customers requested it.

The lunch menu is lighter with fewer side dishes. "It's for people who are on a time, dollar and calorie budget," said Gary Sussman, Platman's husband and business partner.

Desserts are comforting and reassuring, ones Platman remembers from her childhood in England - Apple Brown Betty, Blueberry Bread Pudding and Strawberry Rhubarb Crisp. They're warm desserts served with a dollop of Ray's ice cream.

There's a premium bar, 25 wines by the glass and 40 international and domestic beers,



STAFF PHOTO BY TOM HAWLEY

Be our guest:

Lorraine Platman and Gary Sussman welcome guests to the new Sweet Lorraine's in the Livonia Marriott Hotel. For lunch or dinner, they recommend Hot Yellowfin Tuna "Nicoise" (pictured), sautéed with Yukon gold potatoes, plum tomatoes, green beans, capers, and fresh herbs over organic greens with Dijon vinaigrette, a colorful and satisfying main dish salad.

including one produced by Local Color Brewery in Novi. The lemonade is always freshly squeezed, and you can get an espresso, a cappuccino or smoothie.

Diners eat in an open, colorful and comfortable setting. "We wanted something curvy to bring the ceiling down to make it more intimate," explained Sussman, pointing to shapes that resemble clouds. "We wanted it to be fun but comfortable."

Dennis Larson of Northville painted the murals and designed the ceramic tile mosaic bar. Light fixtures are made from Italian glass. Stephen Sussman and Howard Ellman of Birmingham were the restaurant's architects.

Bringing Sweet Lorraine's to the Livonia Marriott took nearly two years. Both the hotel and the restaurant had reservations. Heydn Kramer, general manager of the Livonia Marriott, has been a fan of Sweet Lorraine's for about 10 years.

"Whenever I had special friends in town that's where I took them," said Kramer, who lives in Plymouth. "They have great food, cool music, and I

thought, 'Why can't I have this at my hotel?'"

One day when he was dining at Sweet Lorraine's in Southfield, Kramer wrote his idea to bring Sweet Lorraine's to the Livonia Marriott on a business card and gave it to Platman. However, she and Sussman weren't the only people to whom Kramer had to sell the idea.

"It was a long, steady battle of convincing a lot of people on both sides," he said. "I had to propose it to people at all different levels of the company. It's a great product. It's that special place where you feel special. It even sounded special."

With Kramer as the catalyst, the Marriott and Sweet Lorraine's began collaborating on a

restaurant. "Their strength is that they're innkeepers. We're restaurateurs. It's a win-win deal," said Sussman.

All of the staff is employed by the Marriott, but the recipes and concepts are Sweet Lorraine's.

Bill Marriott, chief executive officer of the hotel that bears his family's name, recently had dinner at Sweet Lorraine's. "He was enchanted with it," said Kramer. "He loved it and thought the food was wonderful."

Platman is working on the breakfast menu and introducing some of Sweet Lorraine's popular brunch items. Making her guests feel special is a priority. "We get lots of special requests," she said. "And we bend over backwards to fill them."

Home away from home: Colorful and comfortable Sweet Lorraine's at the Livonia Marriott has become a popular dining spot for hotel guests, Laurel Park Place shoppers, and people who work or live nearby.



EATING OUT

Send dinner specials, menu changes, restaurant renovations, and other items to Kety Wygnik, Assistant Managing Editor Features Group, Observer Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150. To fax, (734) 591-7279 or e-mail kwygnik@ohiocomm.net.

We're putting together a list of steakhouses for Father's Day and outdoor dining destinations. If you want to be included, send fax or e-mail restaurant locations, hours and menus to Wygnik as soon as possible.

DINNER DATES

■ The Lark - Annual Italian

theme dinner 7 p.m. Monday or Tuesday, May 22 or 23. Cost \$90 per person, not including tax or gratuity. The restaurant is at 6430 Farmington Road, north of Maple, West Bloomfield. Call (248) 681-4466 for reservations/information.

■ Too Chaz - Executive Chef Greg Upshur will prepare his prix fixe Organic Vegetarian Feast 7 p.m. Tuesday, May 23. The cost is \$28 per person at Too Chaz Restaurant, 27155 Sheraton Drive, Novi. A selection of organic wines will also be available for purchase with the meal. For reservations/information call (248) 348-5555. Too Chaz is open

11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Monday-Saturday for lunch, and 5:30-10 p.m. for dinner. Closed Sunday.

NEW RESTAURANT

■ Quizzo's - Announces the opening of a new Quizzo's Classic Subs restaurant in Farmington Hills in American Plaza, 32515 Northwestern Highway. Quizzo's Classic Subs are served on a soft baguette, baked espe-

cially for the restaurant chain. The subs are prepared and then run open-faced through an oven to melt the cheese and toast the bread before being served. The Farmington Hills Quizzo's is open 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. Monday-Friday; 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Sunday. Customers can order to take out or to eat in the dining room. Call (248) 626-QUIZ to place your carryout order.

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