

DINING

Ernesto's doesn't need a recipe for change

BY MIKE MURPHY
SPECIAL WRITER

Longtime fans of Ernesto's in Plymouth can rest assured that the spacious restaurant's new owner has done little in the way of remodeling and remodeling.

In terms of both atmosphere and menu, Ernesto's has remained the same since Ann Arbor restaurateur Perry Porikos took over in November of last year. With some of the same chefs and many of the same wait staff that have been around since the former Hillside Inn became Ernesto's in the late 1980s, veteran patrons and newcomers alike can expect what Ernesto's has always strived to deliver — fine Italian cuisine at moderate prices.

There's been some painting here and there and some flowers added to the décor of the multi-room restaurant, but not much else.

"About the only new addition is me," said Ernesto's general manager Andrew Andrysiak. "We're using the same foundation that we had when we came on board and just adding to the service level. The food was excellent, so why change it?" Andrysiak, who worked for Porikos for six years at one of the restaurateur's Ann Arbor establishments before coming to

Ernesto's, wants customers to take it easy when they come to Ernesto's.

"My goal is to offer them a wide variety of menu items and beverages, and to take them away from what's outside of the door when they come in," Andrysiak said.

Wide variety

Ernesto's offers its customers casual dining and a wide variety of banquet facilities. You need both hands to count the number of dining areas that fill the two-story restaurant.

There's the main dining area on the first level with its rustic Italian feel. Take a trip upstairs and you wind up in the Country Room, one of three upstairs banquet rooms, where wood-paneled walls display numerous antique farm implements.

"Each room has its own quality to it," said Andrysiak, who estimated that all told, Ernesto's could seat about 600 diners.

Also upstairs is a covered open-air deck for dining during the summer months. Andrysiak's even opened up the wine cellar in the basement of the building to a man who wanted to propose to his girlfriend in a quiet atmosphere.

Within the scope of Italian cuisine, Ernesto's offers a variety of main courses. House specialties include Vitello Tossato, which is veal medallions filled with triple-cream boursin cheese and sun-dried tomatoes sautéed with veal demi-glace. Asparagus and portabella mushrooms are served on the side.

Try the ravioli

Diners might want to try Ernesto's free form ravioli, which contains chunks of lobster tail and rock shrimp sautéed with prosciutto, oyster mushrooms and roasted peppers. The dish is finished with sherry boursin cream and served between layers of spinach and egg pasta.

Then there's shrimp and anchovy linguine, which features shrimp sautéed with garlic, Italian herbs, crushed chili peppers and anchovies tossed with fresh parsley and



House special: General Manager Andrew Andrysiak and Chef Robert Gascogne of Ernesto's Italian Country Inn present one of their specialty dishes, Shrimp and Anchovy Fettuccini.

linguine.

"You're not going to get that anywhere else," Andrysiak said.

Monday through Saturday beginning at 7 p.m. diners are entertained by strolling minstrels.

While the upstairs dining areas are reserved for casual yet somewhat elegant dining and banquet groups, Ernesto's Trattoria, in the basement level of the restaurant, is the place to take the kids. The Trattoria's dishes include lower-priced entrees such as veal and chicken parmesan and a wide variety of pizzas.

On Monday and Tuesday, kids eat free as long as they're accompanied by an adult.

Ernesto's

Where: 41661 Plymouth Road, Plymouth, (734) 453-2002

Open: 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Monday through Thursday, 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. Friday and Saturday, 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. Sunday. The Trattoria downstairs opens daily at 4 p.m.

Reservations: Reservations are accepted for the upstairs dining area. Trattoria is walk-in only.

Cost: Upstairs entrees range from \$12.95 to \$28.95. In the downstairs Trattoria prices range from \$7.95 to \$10.95.

Credit cards: All majors accepted.

Carry-out orders: Call (734)453-2002 or fax (734)453-7490

Seats: 600



Accessory: A decorative phonograph sits just off the main dining room at Ernesto's.

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