

DINING OUT

Griffin's Grille & Spirits has international flair

BY MARY QUINLEY
SPECIAL WRITER

At the end of a long, stressful workday, Dale and Marilyn Cabauatan of Westland are in the mood to sit back, unwind and be waited on.

So, three to four times a week the couple heads to Griffin's Grille & Spirits. "The food and service is good and the staff knows us pretty well," said Dale, who feels more comfortable in the restaurant each time he visits. He and his wife always sit at the same table near the service station.

Griffin's is nestled near the southwest corner of the Westland Shopping Center. It sits on the former site of Jonathan B Pub. The eatery attracts families (there are highchairs) couples and singles. Griffin's stays open every night after the stores have closed in the mall. The restaurant's menu selection is vast.

For starters, patrons can choose Maryland crab cakes, buffalo wings, nachos or an artichoke dip served in a bread bowl. Customers with a light appetite might want to order soup, chili, salad or pizza. More than a dozen sandwiches, including rollups, and a multiple of burger options are available.

Dale usually orders the Teriyaki Chicken as a main course. The portion is a good size, the entree is flavorful and he likes the bed of rice pilaf that is served with the meal. Another of his favorites is the Pecan Crusted White Fish seasoned with a bit of garlic and a touch of sherry.

Griffin's Grille & Spirits
Where: Westland Shopping Center, northwest corner of Warren and Wayne roads, Westland, (734) 513-0080
Open: 11 a.m. to 10 p.m., Monday-Wednesday; 11 a.m. to midnight, Thursday-Saturday, noon to 7 p.m. Sunday.
Menu: American traditional items mixed with an international flavor; sandwiches, soups, burgers, pastas, pizza and main entrees which include fajitas, fish, steaks, chicken and desserts.
Cost: Range from \$5.95 for appetizers to \$16.95 for a sixteen-ounce porterhouse steak. Full bar available. Daily specials. Movie-goers special for \$29.50 (two entrees, two soft drinks and two movie tickets).
Entertainment: 8-10 p.m. on Wednesday, Rob Bugar plays acoustic guitar and keyboard in the bar area.
Reservations: Not necessary.
Credit cards: All major cards accepted.

Marilyn prefers to try a variety of items on the menu. "The last time I was there, I had the salmon special and really enjoyed it," she said. The salmon steak is served with Dijon-cracked pepper sauce, roasted potatoes, steamed vegetables, salad and a roll.

Favorites
The Griffin Salad is one of her favorites. It's prepared with strips of chargrilled chicken breast, salad greens, tomatoes, dried cherries, red onion, walnuts and Gorgonzola cheese. Top it with a drizzle of raspberry walnut dressing for a yummy, heart-healthy meal.

Or try the chicken noodle soup. It "tastes like the soup mama made," said Marilyn. Pastas, fajitas and steaks are other entree choices. All of the steaks and burgers are certified Angus beef.

What about a house specialty? It's the hearty Shepherd's Pie.

"The pie, filled with seasoned beef, then layered with garlic mashed potatoes, is baked in a puff pastry crust and topped with melted cheddar cheese," said co-owner Paul Hess. The result of this three-day process is a full meal, he says, and customers really love it.

Hess, who shares ownership with his wife, Sue, describes the eatery's ambience as a little bit of international flavor combined with American hospitality.

"We try to highlight flavor, texture and freshness," said the Livonia resident, who has worked in the restaurant business approximately 25 years.

Modern day customers have many options when it comes to dining. "If you take a little extra time, patrons will recognize (that we have) an out-of-the-ordinary and not a run-of-the-mill restaurant," Hess said. He believes that people appreciate an independent establishment rather than a chain.



STAFF PHOTO BY JIM JACOBEL

Greeting guests: Proprietor Paul Hess, (left) chats with dinner guests Jade Olsen and Paul Stechschulte. Joining in on the conversation are chef Greg Fargo and assistant manager Donna Fargo.

Hess credits his staff for the restaurant's cohesiveness. Employee turnover is low.

Denise Ruohonen from Garden City is the eatery's general manager, and assistant manager Donna Fargo lives in Livonia.

"These ladies do a fabulous job of adding to customer service and hospitality," said Hess. Hospitality training is essential. "When we train our new employees, we teach them to be attentive to the customer's needs without being overbearing," Hess explained.

Employees who serve alcohol are required to attend an alcohol-awareness class.

In the kitchen is chef Greg Fargo of Garden City. Customer feedback is important to him. "Greg takes a lot of pride in his work," said Hess. "He likes to come out and talk to the customers."

Hess and his wife have worked diligently to imitate a United Kingdom pub with an American flare. Dark oak walls, light music and warm lighting are reminiscent of a welcoming, neighborhood gathering stop.

Folklore

Why the name Griffin's? Blame it on folklore. When Hess decided to research

pubs, he discovered that many of the public houses in the United Kingdom were adorned with figurines called "griffins." A lion's body with long ears and an eagle's head and claws portrays these sculptures that represent strength and vigilance. The creatures were legendary in ancient and medieval times.

As you relax and savor your meal, be sure to check out the decorative griffins that are scattered throughout the eatery.

Mary Quinley is a Livonia resident. She writes about food and travel for the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers. You can contact her at MQinfo@aol.com.

TABLE TALK

Send items for consideration in Table Talk to Keely Kaleski Wygonik, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150, fax (734) 691-7279 or (248) 644-1314. E-mail, copy and paste into message or send as a text file: kywygonik@oe.hometown.com

Excalibur: Banquet and Convention Center, 28847 Franklin Road, Southfield will be open 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. for Easter Sunday brunch. The cost is \$23.75 for

adults, \$14 children ages 4-13, no charge for children under 4. Easter dinners to go are also available for \$125. Dinner package serves 6-8 people and includes mixed organic greens, whipped potatoes, broccoli and carrots, rice pilaf, rolls, cherry and apple pies and your choice of baked ham, roasted turkey or leg of lamb. Pick up 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. Easter Sunday. Call (248) 358-3355 for information/reservations or visit www.thoexcalibur.com

Too Chez Bistro - has made yet another change to reflect its casual bistro-style atmosphere. The restaurant has pared down its extensive wine list to offer a one-page list of Bistro Wines, which range in price from \$15-\$35. The new list offers vintages from producers in France, Italy, California, New Zealand and Australia, just to name a few.

"The purpose of Too Chez Bistro's recent transition was to become more casual and

approachable," said John Baumgartner, general manager. "We want picking a bottle of wine to be fun and easy; it shouldn't be intimidating or seem like rocket science."

If the simplified list of vintages still seems overwhelming, guests can take advantage of Baumgartner's knowledge of wines, as he has received recog-

nition as a Certified Sommelier by the Court of Master Sommeliers. Connoisseurs and patrons celebrating a special occasion can still view the more exclusive reserve list that features more rare vintages. Too Chez features a fresh and flavorful menu served in a casually warm, bistro-style atmosphere. Lunch and dinner are served Monday-

Saturday, and brunch is served Sunday, with seating in the bi-level dining room, in the private chef's room, and in the screened patio during summer months.

Too Chez Bistro is at 27155 Sheraton Drive in Novi, corner of I-96 and Novi Road, across from Twelve Oaks Mall. For more information or to make reservations, call (248) 348-5555.

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