

# Pita Cafe serves authentic mid-Eastern fare

BY MARY QUINLEY  
CORRESPONDENT

At least once every two weeks Alyce Haas enjoys a leisurely meal at Pita Cafe. Sometimes family members accompany her.

"I like the mid-Eastern food," said the Birmingham resident, who has been a "regular" for almost a decade at either the original eatery in Oak Park or the Birmingham location.

In April 2001, a third Pita Cafe opened in Novi.

The restaurant's menu is extensive and the portions are generous.

Entrees, served with soup or salad and rice or fries, are made with lamb, beef, chicken, shrimp, veal or fish.

One of Haas' favorite entrees, and one of the most popular items served, is the Chicken Shawarma.

This flavorful fare is prepared with marinated chicken, parsley, onions, pickles and tahini sauce.

When her dad joins her for dinner the twosome will frequently order this dish and share it.

Many traditional Lebanese recipes, made with grains, vegetables and fruits, are featured on the menu.

The selection of salads includes a Greek, Caesar, red cabbage, and tabbouli, a combo of parsley, tomatoes, green onions and cracked wheat.

"We offer authentic mid-Eastern food (made) with honest to goodness fresh ingredients and homemade cooked meals," said owner.

Al Chahine, who described himself as "a picky eater who believes in my taste buds."

Chahine, a bachelor for 30 years, has basically cooked everything on the menu for himself. "They all are my favorites!" he said, laughing.

Homemade soups include crushed lentil, whole lentil and a daily special. Soups also are available by the quart "to go."

Another frequently ordered dish is the Shish Kabob.

It's made with boneless, skinless chicken breast cubes that are marinated in a special sauce and then charbroiled.

A side of rice accompanies this entree.

Vegetarian meals are a hit with many customers. Madra, browned lentils and cracked wheat topped with sautéed onions, is a popular choice.

Hummus, a smooth, thick blend of chickpeas, oil, lemon juice and tahini sauce, tastes yummy spread on the hot-from-the-oven pita bread.

"When I grew up I thought that pita was the bread that everyone eats," said Chahine, who lived in Lebanon until he was 19 years old.

Pita bread tastes good and it's healthy, he said.

There are no additives or preservatives added to the recipe.

On a recent visit to the Novi restaurant, waiter Ali Mohsen delighted patrons with a demo on how the bread is baked.

The temperature must be at least 534 degrees, he said, as he laid the pancake-shaped, thin slices of dough in the gas-fired oven.

Within seconds the dough began to rise.

Mohsen slid the bread onto a wide, flat spatula, and, then, carefully held the spatula up near the top of the oven to faintly brown the puffy tops.

Patrons who are uncertain about trying the Middle Eastern cuisine might want to order Shish Kabob.

The charbroiled beef tenderloin or lamb is prepared on a skewer with tomatoes, green peppers and onions.

Burgers, fries, tuna salad and broiled white fish are also available.

A kids' menu includes chicken strips and a grilled cheese sandwich.

The juice bar provides an intriguing selection of drinks. Order a glass of carrot, apple, mango or guava juice.

Or be adventuresome and try a raw juice combo made of car-



Traditional bread (above) is baked fresh from the 600-degree wood stove oven that was built especially for the pita bread, served warm with every entree at Pita Cafe. Below, fans of Pita Cafe can enjoy lamb, beef, chicken, shrimp, veal and fish entrees at three locations: Birmingham, Oak Park and Novi.

rot and spinach or a blend of carrot, beet and cucumber.

Not too keen on sipping veggies? Then perhaps a smoothie is more to your liking.

One option is to order your favorite juice blended with bananas, strawberries and honey.

Chefs are trained how to properly marinate and prepare the food. "We must have a chef with experience," Chahine said. He does, however, welcome suggestions from his kitchen staff.

What about future plans for the restaurant entrepreneur? "There's a very good possibility," said Chahine, who always enjoys a challenge.

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



## PITA CAFE

Where: 43224 W. 11 Mile in the Novi Town Center, east of Novi Road and south of I-96, Novi, (248) 347-7444

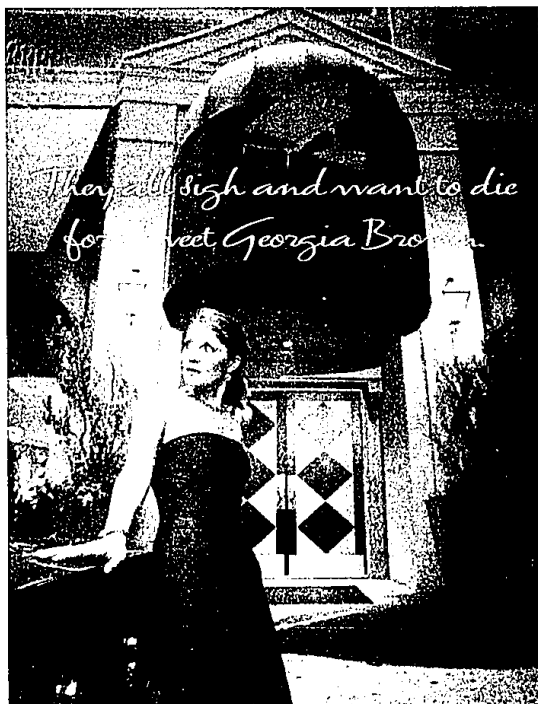
Hours: 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Monday through Saturday, 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. Sunday

Menu: A variety of Middle Eastern cuisine including salads, soups, beef, lamb and fish entrees, vegetarian meals, sandwiches and desserts. A raw juice bar, smoothies and alcohol are available.

Cost: Entrée prices range from \$8.99 to \$14.99; traditional favorites run \$2.45 to \$7.99; and, sandwiches cost \$2.95 to \$5.50.

Credit cards: All major credit cards are accepted.

Other locations: 239 N. Old Woodward at Maple Road, Birmingham, (248) 645-6999, and, 25282 Greenfield at I-696, Oak Park, (248) 968-2225.



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