

Bistro 550 serves made-from-scratch fare

BY CHRISTINE BRODA
STAFF WRITER

After more than 30 years of working as a chef for country clubs and resorts all over Michigan, Chris Byrd wanted to do something in the culinary arts field that was a little more personal and close to home.

That's why the Plymouth resident of 15 years opened Bistro 550 in downtown Plymouth last March.

Located at 550 Forest inside Westchester Square Mall, Bistro 550 replaces Uncle Frank's Chicago and Coney, a long-time favorite restaurant of local citizens.

"I wanted to do something on my own for awhile," said Byrd, who most recently served as manager of the Southfield Manor Club. "This restaurant (Uncle Frank's) had a good reputation in the neighborhood — I wanted to expand on that and add my own touches."

Indeed, former patrons of Uncle Frank's will find many of their favorites still on the Bistro menu, including the classic Chicago-style and Coney Island hot dogs.

"All the really good things we kept," he said, adding that he considers input from diners when designing the menu, which changes seasonally.

Byrd also kept the tradition of the hot dog cart alive at Bistro 550. A trademark favorite of Uncle Frank's, the hot dog cart is available to rent for personal parties and activities. Byrd peddles his fresh all-beef Vienna hot dogs at local events, such as Plymouth's Music in the Air, a



KATY BATTORETTI / OBSERVER

The Bistro 550's famous taco salad.

summer concert series that takes place every Friday in Kelleys Park.

Byrd draws on his extensive culinary experience to create dishes that satisfy customers who long for both the unique as well as the familiar.

"Our food is pretty eclectic," he said.

From the summer menu patrons can choose between a variety of lighter fare, including sandwiches, salads and burgers.

According to Byrd, the most popular item is the chicken salad sandwich, made with chicken, grapes, walnuts and sage mayonnaise on white or multi-grain bread.

Of the number of international sandwiches offered at Bistro 550, Byrd said

his personal favorite is the muffuletta, a New Orleans-style sub topped with olive salad, on a roll. To create this unique taste, Byrd uses three kinds of olives mixed into a relish and tossed in a dressing made with fresh herbs and spices.

The pan bagnat (pronounced "pon-bonyon") is another tasty pick with an international flair. A vegetarian favorite along the Riviera, Byrd creates his own version of the sandwich using chopped tomato and marinated vegetables on a roll.

Another unique item on the menu is the salmon burger, made from boneless, skinless ground salmon and topped with a light lemon dill mayonnaise. And if it's the salmon that entices your taste buds, Byrd recommends the fresh salmon cake salad, a homemade specialty served on greens with lemon dill mayonnaise and a roll.

Byrd said most items at Bistro 550 were once specials that became so popular he decided to include them on the menu on a regular basis.

The search for new and exciting dishes to serve at his restaurant has taken Byrd all across the country, from Philadelphia to New Orleans.

"When I travel I usually pick up items I like and try to incorporate them into my menu," he said.

But no matter what one orders at Bistro 550, customers can be assured they are getting a fresh, homemade dish prepared by Byrd himself.

"There are no mixes or 'prefab' stuff," he said, explaining that all items are made from scratch, right down to the

BISTRO 550

Where: 550 Forest, Plymouth, inside the Westchester Square Mall, (734) 455-4141

Hours: 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday, 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Thursday, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday.

Menu: Known for the famous all-beef Vienna hot dogs, Bistro 550 also offers a wide selection of soups, salads, sandwiches, burgers and vegetarian meals as well as specialty items like quiche and quesadillas.

Cost: Hot dog prices are \$2.50 to \$3.25 (two for \$5), sandwiches run \$3.25 to \$5.50, salads are \$5.25 to \$6.95 and burgers cost \$5.50 to \$6.95.

Payment: Personal checks are accepted.

dressings and fillings. Besides the main entrees, other homemade specials include a variety of desserts such as fresh-baked cookies and brownies, as well as a wide selection of soups like gazpacho and tomato bisque.

"It's what bistros are about — making everything on premise," Byrd said. "I try to keep with that theme."

Another theme of Bistro 550 is the friendly, family-oriented atmosphere Byrd has created between the red walls and wood-planked floors of his dining establishment.

Many of Byrd's customers are regulars who appreciate the cozy environment.

"About 30 percent of the people we know on a first name basis," he said.

Friendliness and familiarity are not hard to come by at Bistro 550, consider-

ing Byrd has made owning and operating the restaurant a family affair. He explained that his wife, Karen, does most of the shopping and menu printing, while his mother-in-law takes care of the accounting and his father-in-law contributes much of the artwork on the walls.

Plymouth resident Peter McKeloy said the restaurant remains a favorite of his since he started dining there seven years ago when it was Uncle Frank's.

"What keeps him coming back for more?"

"The food," he answered, adding that he also enjoys the convenient, courteous service.

"It's a friendly place."

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