

Taste of Italy is ‘sweet’

By Courtney Breve
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It’s been five years since I roamed the cobblestone streets of Venice, Florence and Rome, but the mural inside a new Frankfort restaurant quickly took me back to that whirlwind tour of Italy.

The hand painted scene of a picturesque plaza jolted my memory to the long strolls on winding roads that felt like walking back in time.

But it was the aroma wafting from the kitchen of LaDolce Vita Della Piazza that triggered my lifelong love affair with Italian cuisine.

Like the Lemont restaurant of the same name, which means “the sweet life,” the Frankfort location provides a welcoming atmosphere, heaping servings of upscale fare and knowledgeable service.

“Frankfort is a nice, unique town with a lot of character,” said Wayne Spitzer, who owns the restaurant with Ralph Greco and brothers Dan and Phil Lombardo. “It’s an up and coming area, and the expansion out there is going to be tremendous.”

The restaurant has seating for 72, and another eight can relax at the curved bar. A divider wall outfitted with two picture windows separates the main dining room from the smoking section and bar area, making both parts seem more intimate.

On a recent Thursday night, my companion and I were treated graciously, even though we arrived shortly before the kitchen was set to close. It had been a busy night, and we were assured one more table wouldn’t inconvenience the chef.

We dove into a basket of warm bread and dipped it in a blend of olive oil and Parmesan. The bread was wonderful, but I would advise against filling up early.

For starters, we sampled formaggio di capra al forno and funghi ripieni. The baked goat cheese on garlic croutons melted in my mouth, although soaking the bread in red sauce made the croutons a bit soggy. The latter option, mushrooms caps stuffed with seasoned breadcrumbs and cheese, was simply delicious.

Other appealing appetizers included baked clams, calamari and polenta baked with meat sauce and cheese.

A large bowl of house salad, which is served with most entrees, arrived next. The mix of greens, vegetables and olives was finely coated in an Italian dressing, but our tummies were filling fast.

At our server’s recommendation, I ordered the capellini con scampi Franco, an angel hair pasta entrée prepared with shrimp, spinach and an alfredo sauce. The large portion was intimidation, but the dish was too good to stop eating. The shrimp were lightly sautéed, and the alfredo was far from overpowering. A dozen other pasta dishes are offered regularly. My companion opted for filetto di manzo portabello. The meal consisted of three, 3-ounce beef tenderloin medallions accompanied by Portobello mushrooms, artichoke hearts and sweet peppers in a red wine gravy. Again, a rave review.

Other house specialties include melanzane al forno, baked eggplant in tomato sauce and topped with mozzarella; salsiccia e pepperoni, sausage and peppers in a white wine garlic sauce; costolette di maiale Napoletano, pork chops with sweet peppers, onions, tomatoes and white wine.

The menu also features a dozen fish and chicken entrees, as well as nightly specials.

We finished our meals with a rich piece of tiramisu and probably the best spumoni I've ever tasted.

The wine list offers a variety, by the bottle or the glass, including a very good Pinot Noir.

The restaurant's self-titled signature cocktail is a twist on the traditional French martini. It's yummy, sweet and another dessert option.