



The Patriot-News

Koi's menu melds eclectic cuisines

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Koi, a new Hampden Twp. restaurant, advertises its cuisine as modern Vietnamese.

Yet the BYOB restaurant at 3421 Simpson Ferry Road near the new Cinema Center melds Thai, Korean, Chinese, French and American influences on its menu.

"It's a lot of fusion," said Mai Tran, who opened the restaurant with her sister, Que Tran, two weeks ago at a former Chinese buffet. "It's a lot of things we ate growing up mixed in with things we like."

Their mother, Sandra Tran, is helping them in the kitchen. She is Vietnamese and operates Dong My Asian Specialty Food, a Korean stand at the West Shore Farmers' Market. She also ran the Deli Bean at Strawberry Square until it closed earlier this summer.

Que Tran, who also worked at the Deli Bean, operates A Matter of Taste at the farmers' market.

While growing up, the girls said they remember food as a central force in their family. Daily dinners and Sunday gatherings were important to the family, and their mother continues to entertain.

"We kind of all got together. What flavors do we like, what haven't we seen on menus before?" Mai Tran said. "Basically, I wanted the restaurant to be a place where I would like to eat."

Koi shares the same name as a West Hollywood hot spot where celebrities dine, but the sisters said they weren't aware of the name repeat. They liked the word and plan to incorporate a koi pond into the decor.

The menu is heavy on soups, a mainstay of Vietnamese cuisine that are served as main courses.

A spicy seafood rice vermicelli with shrimp and crab is expected to become a signature item. The soup combines chunks of crab with whole shrimp, tomatoes, noodles and cilantro and sells for \$9 a bowl at lunch and \$11 at dinner. Other soups include traditional phos with chicken, pork, beef or shrimp along with a wonton soup and chicken curry.

There are appetizers including spring rolls with fish sauce and summer rolls with peanut sauce, papaya slaw, grilled vegetables on lemongrass skewers and shrimp chips.

Other dishes include a pagoda salad with greens, mandarin oranges, sprouts, nuts, sesame seeds, crispy noodles and a hoison vinaigrette; smoked sushi salad with a wasabi vinaigrette; and steak and potato salad.

Entrees include rice vermicelli with grilled chicken or beef, pad Vietnam, beef and sprout stirfry, carmel salmon fillet in tomato sauce and grilled wasabi chicken. Dinner prices range from \$5 for appetizers to between \$9 and \$15 for entrees.

Hours: 11 a.m.-2 p.m. and 4-10 p.m. Tuesday-Sunday. Closed Monday. Phone: 230-8112.

Cafe Fresco pulls into downtown:

A favorite Swatara Twp. cafe has expanded into downtown Harrisburg.

Cafe Fresco Center City opened last week at 215 N. Second St., a more upscale version of its three-year-old companion in the Scottsdale Plaza near Harrisburg Mall. It takes over the Mulberry Lane gift shop next to Stocks on 2nd.

"I wanted to be part of the downtown growth but also to bring in this type of restaurant, there's no better

place than downtown to do it," said owner Nick Laus. "We're a compliment to downtown, we're bringing in something different."

Laus has blended many aspects from his suburban restaurant with metropolitan touches.

With the exception of new dinner entrees, the breakfast, lunch and dinner menus are identical and emphasize breakfast wraps, espresso drinks, gourmet pizzas, sandwiches, burgers and salads.

The decor is contemporary with a Mediterranean color scheme, high-back love seats, chairs and benches, concrete floor and hand-blown glass Italian lights.

There is a full-service bar with bottles of imported and domestic beers, frozen and mixed drinks, pitchers of sangria and a wine list.

Laus said he turned to friend, Anthony Amato, owner of Al Mediterraneo, Hummelstown, to assist with designing the wine menu, which focuses on lighter, boutique wines from around the world.

Amato also lent a hand creating a five-item dinner menu. It includes crab cake Florentine (lump crab cake over spinach served with avocado salsa, lemon avocado aioli, bean sprouts and focaccia bread); farfalle rosa (salmon over pasta with Absolut Vodka, white wine, Spanish onion, bacon and tomato pink sauce); and three cheese pesto ravioli (tossed with portobello mushrooms, sundried tomatoes, basil pesto and diced grilled eggplant). Entrees are priced \$12 to \$18.

After 4 p.m. service changes from counter to table side.

Hours: 7 a.m.-11 p.m. Monday-Wednesday and 7 a.m.-midnight Thursday-Saturday. Phone: 236-2599.

Houlihan's coming to Hershey:

Houlihan's, a national chain, will open in Derry Twp. next spring on the first floor of the Hershey Press Building, Chocolate and Park avenues.

The restaurant will include a dining area, lounge and bar with seating for 200. Menu focuses on steaks, ribs, pastas and burgers. The first Houlihan's opened in Kansas City in 1972.

Market chef cook-off returns:

For the fifth year, the Broad Street Market is sponsoring the Super Chef Cookoff pitting local chefs to see who can create the best tasting dish using market ingredients.

Heat one will take place 11 a.m. Saturday with Matthew Black of Pesce Mediterranean Bistro, Tony Carricato of Juliana's Italian Restaurant, Josh Easton of 2201 in the Boro and Elide Hower of Mangia Qui.

Heats will take place at the market on Saturdays through August with the winners competing in the finals Aug. 27. The winner of the final will be named Super Chef of the Year.

New this year -- chefs will receive a mystery box of ingredients to use for their dish. A common pantry has been added for the chefs to share.

Iron chef results announced:

A group of local chefs recently faced off in an Iron Chef style competition at Gullifty's, Lower Allen Twp. Tiffany M. Payne of Gullifty's and Rachel Neptune of Elephant & Castle Pub & Restaurant emerged victorious. They created three dishes using tomatoes including various sushi, shrimp-stuffed crab tempura and a tomato basil tortilla basket with ice cream.

Word of Mouth, which appears Wednesdays, covers news of restaurants in the midstate. Columnist Sue Gleiter can be reached at 255-8230 or sgleiter@patriot-news.com.

Reviews of area restaurants by Mimi Brodeur appear Thursdays in our Go! section.

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