

Harvest Cafe is a hit, say diners

Restaurant employs clients of A Very Special Place, helping them learn skill-set; food lives up to noble mission

By VIRGINIA N. SHERRY
STATEN ISLAND ADVANCE

NEW DORP — Harvest Cafe was packed for lunch last Wednesday, and one of the satisfied diners was **Robert Fitzsimmons**, who ordered New England shrimp and clam chowder with pancetta — one of two house-made soups of the day — followed by a pan-seared Nantucket crab cake sandwich with Napa slaw.

It was his first visit to the New Dorp Lane restaurant, which opened last year. “The chowder was out of this world — almost a meal in itself,” raved Fitzsimmons, president of Gateway Arms Realty Corp. in St. George. “I’m going to recommend this place to everyone I know. We want the North Shore to know about it!”

Joining him was **Martin Friedman**, another first-time patron who loved the food and pronounced the service “excellent. Four people waited on us, and all of them were great.”

Rounding out the table were **Norma Sue Wolfe** of St. George and **Roberta “Bobbi” Jacobowitz** of Westerleigh, regulars at Harvest Cafe since it opened. Ms. Jacobowitz enjoyed a potato and sweet-potato omelet — “big and fluffy and delicious, filled with spinach and mushrooms,” she reported.

The foursome was too full to order dessert. “The best crème brûlée I ever ate was here,” said Ms. Wolfe.

SERIOUS BUSINESS

Rob Burmeister, a West Brighton resident, is the creative chef at the helm in the kitchen, working with fresh, high-quality ingredients.

Harvest Cafe serves “great food with a mission,” said **Diane Buglioli**, deputy executive director of A Very Special Place, Inc., the Staten Island-based non-profit agency that owns the restaurant.

The mission is to provide developmentally disabled Staten Islanders with opportunities to develop skills after graduating from high-school.



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Enjoying an al-fresco lunch on Aug. 15 at the Harvest Café on New Dorp Lane, are, from the left, Margaret Ferrigno of Castleton Corners; Isabella Ginos and her mother, Cathy Imbesi-Ginos, of Annadale, and Lucille Dybdal of Eltingville.

Harvest Cafe

Richmond County Savings Foundation funded the restaurant's kitchen equipment, and Polonsky Dare to Dream Fund funded the delivery van and delivery equipment.

Basics

694 New Dorp Lane
Phone: 347-857-6888
Hours: Breakfast and lunch, Monday through Saturday, 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.
Thursday and Friday, Dinner also available, 4:30 to 9 p.m.
On-site and off-premises catering available.

“This is a new model,” Ms. Buglioli noted. “We have professional restaurant staff and professional habilitators and assistants working with our trainees.”

Harvest Café's trainees — currently 21 in total — “cycle through” the restaurant, as part of their Monday-through-Friday adult day program, filling one or more of 12 available positions.

Some of them work in the kitchen, learning restaurant-preparation skills; others assist the profes-

sional wait staff at tables, or work as the greeter at the front of the house.

The trainees “have grown tremendously,” observed West Brighton native **Maureen Brennick**, associate executive director, who has worked for A Very Special Place for 24 years. In the course of the on-the-job training, “they’ve learned a lot of social skills, too,” she noted.

“Our regular customers notice and remark about this all the time,” added Ms. Buglioli. “They see the progress.”

AL FRESCO

The restaurant's classic white front porch — with overhead ceiling fans — provides a spot for patrons who prefer al-fresco dining.

Last Wednesday, a party of four sat at one of the large tables for a birthday luncheon for Annadale resident **Cathy Imbesi-Ginos**, a guidance counselor at Staten Island Technical High School in New Dorp. In addition to two friends, her daughter, **Isabella**, 11, who enters seventh-grade at Barnes Intermediate School next month, was part of the party. It was the first visit for all, and they were not disappointed.

“The food was outstanding,” said **Lucille Dybdal** of Huguenot, now retired as a guidance counselor at

Tech. “This place is such a wonderful thing,” she commented, noting its mission.

“My New England chowder and crab cake was excellent,” added **Margaret Ferrigno** of Castleton Corners, another guidance counselor at the high school.

Ms. Imbesi-Ginos raved about the turkey sandwich with grilled apples and Brie cheese that she selected for lunch.

HIGH HOPES

For the dedicated staff, the hope is for greater exposure and continuing success for Harvest Café.

“Some days, we’re so busy that you can’t get a table,” said Ms. Buglioli. “We have about 110 regular customers who’ve been with us from the beginning. People buy into this. They get it. It’s a chance for them to give back in such an easy way.”

Harvest Café offers “gourmet food at rock-bottom prices,” commented Ms. Wolfe, one of the lunch-time diners last week. She noted that her party of four “ate lavishly, and the bill was only \$60, including the tip.”

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