

La Dolce Vita changes, stays sweet

By TANYA KURLAND
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Diners don't have to travel all the way to Italy to get authentic Italian cuisine. La Dolce Vita, 1237 Prospect St., features a wide range of pasta, fish and chicken recipes tailored from specific Italian regions. Owner Enzo Castigline hopes that new menu items and musical entertainment nights will help reintroduce the ristorante back into the local population.

"The restaurant is like a typical dining experience in Italy," Castigline said in his thick Italian accent.

Translated into English as "The Sweet Life," the restaurant seats up to 60 people in both indoor and outdoor seating. While eating, patio diners can relax to the bubbling sounds of a dolphin sculpture water fountain and watch people stroll by adjoining shops.

The restaurant first opened in

'I wanted to offer lighter and healthier meals.'

— Enzo Castigline

October of 1996. Castigline originally co-owned the restaurant with two friends, Michael and Dino Ismic, until last summer when the brothers decided to move to the Big Apple to open their own restaurant.

"The restaurant was small and didn't need three managers," Castigline explained. "We were either going to expand or they wanted to move to New York. We parted on good terms. I plan on making a trip out there to help them with their menu."

Officially the sole owner of the restaurant since last September, Castigline began making small changes to the eatery. As the restaurant's chef before and after the new ownership, Castigline reworked the existing menu and added new lunch items.

"I wanted to offer lighter and healthier meals," he said.

In the past, the restaurant offered the same items at both afternoon and evening meals. Now diners can choose among several sandwiches including Panino Caprese, one of the more requested lunch items made of Italian cured ham with fresh buffalo mozzarella cheese, sliced tomato and a touch of house special dressing on Italian bread. All sandwiches are accompanied by small Caesar or mixed green salads.

The menu also offers salads such as Insalata di Pollo, romaine lettuce with chicken marinated in honey mustard, and Insalata Con Gamberi, romaine lettuce with shrimp sautéed with sun-dried tomatoes, basic, garlic and light marinara sauce.

Customers can also order pasta for lunch, including Spaghetti Carbonara and Fettucini Primavera.

"This place is not really a lunch destination, but we have been getting a lot more customers," Cas-



Village News/Tanya Kurland

Waiter Brett Baric serves patrons authentic Italian Cuisine at La Dolce Vita, 1237 Prospect St., now under sole ownership of Chef Enzo Castigline.

To provide more of an Italian feel, two opera tenors perform every Thursday beginning at 7 p.m. The restaurant also plays host to acoustic guitar players every Sunday night.

"I wanted to get more locals into the place," said Castigline, who has advertised in various publications to attract more customers. "It has been getting popular."

Every few nights, Castigline also creates different food specialties, such as pork medallion in an orange sauce and pastas with various sauces.

"Dinner plates are more sophisticated — a lot more work is done on them," Castigline said. "Everything is made fresh from scratch."

Castigline has worked in the restaurant industry for the past 14 years as a chef on boat cruises and in restaurants in England and Miami. In 1995 he moved to California, where he opened La Dolce Vita in Carmel with the Ismic brothers and another partner who still runs the restaurant.

With many new restaurants opening and subsequently closing, Castigline feels business will just continue to grow and flourish despite nearby competition.

"To me, cooking is like art — I like to make the right presentation as often as I can," he said. "There