

The Two Faces of Café Roma

By Randall G. Mielke

It's a daunting task, but Café Roma in Elgin, a restaurant with contemporary Italian cuisine, is attempting to be a lot of things to a lot of people. So far, it seems to be working.

Owned and operated by Frank and Jennifer Redisi of Bartlett, Café Roma is located in a business park at Interstate 90 and Randall Road, which means its main clientele are the corporate lunch crowd. "We do the quick service at lunch because we're catering to the business crowd, and they have limited lunch hours," Jennifer explains.

But on Thursday and Friday nights, the fast-serve, casual eatery is transformed into an elegant, white tablecloth, full-service dinner restaurant.

"We opened in June 2008 and started the dinner service in August 2008 when we got our liquor license," Redisi says.

The restaurant's décor is well-suited to both styles of service. Comfortable booths line wood-paneled walls while tables and chairs occupy the larger portion of the room. A small bar area with six stools complements the 68-seat dining area. An outdoor patio accommodates another 20 to 30 diners. The café décor is done in muted browns and yellows with black accents. There is ample window light.

Chef Frank Redisi serves high-quality meals and keeps the menu simple so that the kitchen staff can carry out his exacting standards. "We focus on doing a few things really well," says Jennifer. "The food we prepare is very fresh. Everything is homemade."

Café Roma offers such items as specialty pizzas, made with fresh vegetables, meats and cheeses; traditional Italian sandwiches, including an Italian beef slow-roasted with garlic, beef stock and tomato; and chicken, fish and beef entrées that include a salad, vegetable or potato. In addition to being trained at Le Cordon Bleu culinary school, Chef Frank lived in Rome for a year and traveled throughout Italy. "You just can't find a bad meal in Italy," he says.

Prices are \$4 to \$9 for appetizers, salads and desserts; \$7 to \$9 for pizzas; \$7 to \$10 for sandwiches; and \$8 to \$24 for entrées. Most lunch items average around \$7.

"On the weekends, we do private parties in-house," Jennifer says. "We've done baby showers, surprise birthday parties and corporate dinners."

Ironically, the Redisis ended their own corporate careers in order to start their restaurant, but the majority of their patrons are corporate employees. Prior to opening Café Roma, Frank was an executive chef and director of food service for a



(Dustin Waller photos)

large company, and Jennifer worked as a district sales manager in a large organization.

"Frank was burned out in corporate America, and so was I," says Jennifer. "We felt if we were going to be working really hard, we should work for ourselves."

And so they are. "We get up every morning looking forward to going to work."

Café Roma, at 2175 Point Blvd., Elgin, is open for lunch from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday through Friday. Dinner is served 3 to 9 p.m. on Thursday and Friday. ■



Chef Frank Redisi lived in Rome for a year and adores Italian dishes.