

## The Regency Ethnic Restaurant Eat Around, EREA, Goes Back To School For An Italian Dinner- Part one

By Marty Feldman

Here at Regency it is not uncommon for us to 'eat out' once, twice, three times or more each week and it is not uncommon that the go to eatery is the ubiquitous red sauce, chicken parm, eggplant rollatini Italian restaurant; not that that is bad.

So when the idea to offer our group an Italian dinner was considered, the problem was how to make it interesting enough and also hold true to the goals of the EREA; offering new or less frequently available foods from around the boot.

I chose to work with the chef and co-owner of La Cipollina restaurant in Freehold, where I've eaten many times and knew I could fulfill my needs. La Cipollina is also one of, if not the first, to offer learn and dine cooking classes to its patrons. Sitting down with Chef Matt Higgins, we worked out a menu that would satisfy any lover of Italian food and stay true to the EREA goals.

A second problem that was anticipated and occurred was the popularity of Italian food was enough to register so many people that a second date was required so as not to eliminate so many from this interesting and delicious cooking class/ dinner.

At the time of this writing, the first class/ dinner has been successfully held with forty five participants and the second with fifty four is scheduled in two weeks.

As usual for a Regency dinner, diners were on time or early in getting to the restaurant, seated with wine bottles open when chefs and co-owners Matt Higgins and Anthony Braica began the class. The chefs requested and enthusiastically received Regency volunteers to assist in demonstrating the preparations (see Photos)

Our first appetizer course was a stuffed artichoke (my specialty). With a show of hands, it was interesting to see how many in our group had never eaten a stuffed artichoke. Chef Braica demonstrated the correct way to eat the artichoke by pulling off each tough petal containing the stuffing and scraping the inside with the top teeth towards the base and tender part. When all of the firm petals are used the tender petals and artichoke heart may be eaten in its entirety. Fun Fact 1: the Globe artichoke is the largest member of the thistle family. Fun Fact 2: after eating an artichoke, wine will taste sweeter than before.

The second of the appetizers was a deliciously satisfying stuffed chicken leg. While preparation of the appetizers was going on, servers were delivering to diners, plates containing half of a stuffed artichoke and stuffed chicken leg, the latter having been deboned and stuffed in a very simple demonstrated procedure. As far as the ingredients for the dishes discussed, they will be discussed in detail in Part two of this article.

Course three was a Sicilian pasta dish surprisingly simple to prepare yet delicious in that simplicity, Farfalle with Cauliflower. As preparing this dish was being shown, steaming bowls of pasta were brought out each guest while servers went around grating Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese over the pasta. Fun Fact 3: did you know that in order not to burn garlic it should be added to cold oil in the pan then heated.

The fourth course was a stuffed and rolled pork loin, Bracciole style. Here however, rather than cook the stuffed loin in a gravy the fresh tomato gravy was plated and the pinwheel slices of pork were placed on top with enough potato mash to absorb any gravy and juices present.

Last but definitely not least, dessert was the La Cipollina take on Italian Cheesecake. You might say what is so unique about cheesecake and the answer is this one was otherworldly. Instead of the typical dense, grainy, ricotta cheesecake filling, their not so secret ingredient transformed the filling to an ethereal, melt in your mouth, not too sweet event and the perfect way to end a wonderful dinner

Part two of this article will be in next month's Regency Reporter.

The next EREA dinner will be a Chinese Banquet in January to celebrate the Lunar New Year of the Golden Rat. As always, call me with any questions.