

Life in LAMORINDA

Knox – A New Addition to Restaurant Row

By Cathy Tyson



From left, Gary Singh and Jay Singh, Managers of Knox Photo Cathy Tyson

"I totally believe if you serve good food at a reasonable price, people will come in," said Gary Singh, Manager of Knox, located in that space that used to house Per Tutti on Mount Diablo Boulevard. Officially open since December, it's clear that the kitchen has mastered the art of Italian comfort food, with equally attentive service.

It's a bit of a family affair, Gary Singh and brother-in-law Jay Singh share managing duties and Gary's daughter is the hostess. In

the kitchen is Italian chef Francesco Torre, from the Piedmont region of the country - the northwest side of the boot. Friendly, professional servers round out the staff. "We treat the employees like they're family," says Singh.

Starting this week, Knox is promoting their brand new \$3, \$4, \$5 Happy Hour, with beer on tap for \$3, well drinks \$4 and wine \$5. There will also be a small bar menu featuring \$3, \$4 and \$5 appetizers. Singh explains, "We want people

to come in, give it a try, and come back for a meal."

Lunch and dinner menus are divided into antipasti, insalate, primi e zuppe, secondi and dessert, along with an extensive wine list and full bar.

On a recent Saturday night, the place was packed with hungry patrons creating a fairly loud buzz filling the intimate room. Chef Torre puts an innovative spin on Italian classics as well as many dishes Lamorindans may not be familiar with, like boned leg of lamb stuffed with frittata served with broccolini rabe.

Our party of four started with butter lettuce, black olive, oven dried cherry tomatoes, and taleggio cheese salad, and the little jam lettuce salad with pecorino cheese, walnuts and crispy prosciutto. Choice of a handful of salad dressings is served on the side. An order of mussels in a rich candied garlic broth and an interesting take on a trio of bruschette one each topped with roasted bell peppers, tomato and a basil eggplant mousse are two of the four starters offered. Thumbs up all the way around, salads crisp and fresh, mussels perfectly prepared, although the

non-pitted olives were a distraction.

On the whole everything was quite good, although there were some minor bumps in the road. Celery root soup, something you don't see every day, was luscious, rich and creamy. Cod in parchment could have used a bit more seasoning. A delicious menu highlight was the server-recommended Tagliatelle al Sugo Toscano, or tagliatelle pasta made in-house with Tuscan style meat sauce.

Desserts were a mix of old and new, along with classics like Pannecotta, chocolate and espresso cake served with candied blood oranges, a table favorite was pear cooked in red wine and spices served in cinnamon custard. The unique deconstructed Tiramisu, was a very original interpretation, like nothing we had seen before.

"Give it a go, you won't be disappointed," said diner Andy Firth. Knox is open every day for lunch and dinner from 11:00 a.m., 3576 Mt. Diablo Boulevard.

Knox Restaurant, Lounge
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DIAMOND CERTIFIED

Lamorinda Schools Face Significant Funding Reductions

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The Governor's idea to allow schools to cut the school year down to 175 days from 180 days has raised more than eyebrows in the Lamorinda school community. Longtime OUSD Board of Trustees member Pat Rudebusch seemed incredulous of the option. "The United States already has one of the shortest school years as compared to other developed nations," she stated. "We are looking at some potentially drastic changes to how we educate our youth, and it's not for the better." Negri of AUHSD questioned the legality of the option as presented by the Governor. In addition, administrators acknowledged that the reduced work schedule, and consequently reduced pay, for both teachers and classified employees would have to be negotiated through their bargaining units.

According to Negri, AUHSD will weather the proposed midyear cuts due to \$2 million in undesignated funds that the District was able to save through a spending and hiring freeze. However, the financial picture for the 2009-2010

school year looks much less balanced with the District projecting a \$5.2 million deficit. The AUHSD Board has begun to hold budget study sessions to identify potential cuts including the elimination of class size reduction and reducing counseling, library, and healthcare services. The possibility of taking an increased parcel tax measure to the voters is also on the table.

In the Lafayette School District, Superintendent Dr. Fred Brill said the district is expecting a \$940,000 mid-year budget cut. "We believe we have the capacity to handle that," said Brill. This will, however, result in a \$220,000 structural deficit for the district. "We will be spending more dollars than we're bringing in and can't sustain that," said Brill. The district expects the deficit will rise to around \$600,000. "We are in some uncharted territories," he added.

"All the low hanging fruit is gone. Now we're looking at people," stated Moraga School District Superintendent Rick Schafer, who estimates that his district is facing a

million dollar plus shortfall through the end of this school year and the next. Having already moved to freeze all spending except that which is "mission critical," he has also developed a cut list that includes elimination of personnel and programs.

OUSD also expects to be short a million dollars in operating funds secondary to the State financial crisis. The OUSD Board has begun to examine the budget and to review a list of potential budget reductions, which includes possible cuts to class size reduction, art and music instruction, and math and literary specialists.

All of the school districts expect to lean heavily on the monies raised by their educational foundations, parent clubs and PTAs to help them manage through the budget morass. "One of our great challenges in talking about programs and reducing or eliminating them to achieve savings relates to the fact that the parents clubs and the Educational Foundation underwrite many of them," states OUSD

Board President Riki Sorenson. "So any action would require agreement with those stakeholders and deferral of money back to the school district to keep other programs alive."

As mandated by the State, schools must announce lay-off notices by March 13th.

Jean Follmer contributed to this article.

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The Return of the Suburban Chicken

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Both women emphasize the need for a covered fenced area where the chickens will be protected from the numerous local predators, raccoons, foxes, eagles, coyotes and even rats.

People who have chickens on smaller lots do it for the same reasons and share the same enthusiasm. "Chickens are very sociable animals," said "Mark" who raises 3 chickens on 1/3 of an acre, "our son built a chicken coop according to instructions we found on a web site and the chickens roost there every night." The rest of the time, the chickens roam the 10 X 4 feet enclosure they have built for them. They too eat the eggs, give the kitchen scraps to the chickens and put the manure in their compost pile.

"I collect the manure a few times a month," said Teri Fadelli. She is so happy to live on a property that used to be a chicken farm, "everything I plant here thrives," she says.

Michelle Chan of 4H warns about a few things that people need to watch for when raising chickens. "You need to keep the animals' water clean and fresh," she says, "make sure you put wire under the coop, and not only chicken wire, something sturdy otherwise raccoons can go through it." She recommends plenty of room for chickens to dig and take a dust-bath.

Chan is not particularly concerned with diseases, "chickens are like any other pets, they need to be watched and if one gets sick it needs to be taken care of." 4H

teaches children to care for the animals and also participates in shows and exhibitions. Chan sees chickens as wonderful pets and a great opportunity for children to experience the cycle of food.

Sustainable Lafayette co-founder Steve Richard is a supporter of chickens as well. "This is a great way to create your own food," says Richard, who has been playing with the idea of getting chickens himself but has not taken that step yet, "farming has a long history in Lamorinda and with the rising interest in eating locally grown food it seems that the number of people interested in chickens

is increasing."

Interest in chickens is growing in the media as well, with a site like urbanchicken.net, or the recent ABC 7 (KGO) television news story that featured Moraga's former Mayor Lynda Deschambault, who was forced to remove her chickens from her property, or "The New Coop de Ville" article in the Newsweek of November 24th featuring urban raised chickens in cities such as New York, South Portland, Ann Arbor and Ft. Collins.

What comes first, the chicken or the ordinance? In Lamorinda, the story is a handful just beginning,

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