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A flurry of Indian eateries offer plenty for vegans et al.



Aloo Naan at Naan Curry

Photos Jenn Freedman



Masala dosa at Saffron



Golden warrior at Baagan

By Jenn Freedman

The past few months have brought a handful of new Indian restaurants to Lamorinda. With them comes greater variety for all Lamorinda residents, including more plant-based options than ever before.

Most recently, Naan Curry opened in mid-February on the west side of Mt. Diablo Boulevard. Previously named T's Firehouse, owner Harjinder Singh is transitioning ownership to his son, Sahib Tiwana, and they have brought on new chef Farooq Multani. The updated menu boasts a handful of vegan appetizers and plenty of vegan entrees ... even their naan bread is uncommonly vegan. The vegetable karahi brings on the chili heat and maintains a perfect, firm texture. For a milder option, the saag aloo (spinach potato) is a good choice. And the aloo (potato) naan is an aromatic delight, stuffed with garlic and carom seed.

In Moraga, Indian-inspired vegan restaurant Baagan opened in November. "Eat the Way Nature Intended" is Baagan's slogan: the menu offers organic, healthy, plant-based meals like burgers, seasonal salads, and teas. Plus, two new items have just

been added to the menu: chickpea tacos, served with coleslaw and creamy cilantro sauce, and two varieties of samosas, keema (with lentils) and potato/pea.

Baagan's hot creamy lattes are also a standout: the Peaceful Panda with matcha green tea, ginger, and cashew milk is decadently warming, or for a decaf option try the Golden Warrior made with turmeric, cardamom, and cashew milk.

Family owned and operated Saffron is also a newcomer to Lamorinda, opening last October in Orinda Theatre Square. In addition to an extensive menu of North Indian favorites, Saffron also offers dosas, a staple of South Indian cuisine (currently only offered during lunchtime). The masala dosa is divine, stuffed with potatoes and spices and served with sambhar (a sweet and tart lentil soup) – a wonderful item for sharing as an appetizer. Another highlight is the mixed vegetable, with hint of natural sweetness from the peas and carrots offset with a spicy heat. Even the side of rice had an undeniable addictive though mild flavor.

Saffron follows a slow cooking method, so each dish takes 10-15 minutes to customize. For this reason, the restaurant is not totally bound to the menu – if you want

something specific or have a dietary restriction, just ask and they will always try to accommodate. In fact, they don't even mind if you call ahead to put in your request.

And finally, long-standing establishment Swad Indian Cuisine in Lafayette has been serving delicious, authentic fare for over 10 years. To start, Swad offers an entire vegetarian appetizer menu – try the assorted vegetable platter, which includes samosa, vegetable pakora (fritters), vegetable cutlet, and pappadum (lentil wafers). For entrees, the baingan bhartha (eggplant with peas) is delicate and silky smooth with a perfect balance of sweet and spicy. The dal makhani (black lentils) are satisfying and gingery. The saag aloo (spinach potato) has an impressive depth of savory flavor and spice. And the aloo gobi (potato cauliflower) is hearty and aromatic, with sweet notes from the onion.

With so many flavorful choices, plant-based eating has never been easier. Bon appetite!



Assortment at Swad

Rotary gala event supports victims of sex trafficking

By Pippa Fisher

It was a crowded scene at Oakwood Athletic Club Saturday, March 23 as the Lafayette Rotary Club hosted a benefit gala for local nonprofit New Day for Children, an organization which provides safe housing, school and therapy to girls ages 10 to 18 who are victims of sex trafficking.

Attendees came to the fun event in a generous mood and, with the help of Auctioneer Mike Jones from Charity Benefit Auctions, were encouraged to spend big money.

The Rotary had help from the Interact Students of Acalanes and the National Charity League Lamorinda Chapter.

Diners heard from a number of speakers including Rep. Mark DeSaulnier. Powerful testimony came from Mason Gizard, the son of a sex trafficking victim who told of his childhood experience and of being homeless.

Speaking publicly for only the second time Avery McBeth, a New Day for Children graduate, told her story

and testified that the organization had saved her.

"The Rotary did a fantastic job. It was well planned and well executed," said New Day for Children executive director Sharon Wood, adding, "I'm so proud of Mason and Avery."

New Day for Children opened its doors in 2009, providing long-term residential care. The organization has seen 85 girls through the program thus far. Although some girls have stayed as long as five years the average stay is closer to 15 months. It is one of very few such facilities throughout the country. New Day relies on donors, as it accomplishes its work without state or federal funding.

Support from the gala will be used to provide schooling, a safe place to live, medical, dental and vision needs as well as specialized therapy, including therapeutic horse camp for the girls.

Although a final count of money raised at the gala was not available before going to press, it is expected to be substantially over \$100,000, according to Wood.

Anyone interested in learning more about the organization can visit www.newdayforchildren.com.



Gala guests checking the silent auction items

Photo Pippa Fisher