

# Cucina! Presto! offers Italian eats at cheap prices

By Kristina Rudinskas  
Student Activities Reporter

It's 1:30 p.m., and you're on the corner of 13th Avenue and Kincaid Street with your stomach grumbling. Where do you eat? Is your stomach saying sub sandwich, crepe, Chinese food, pizza or bagel sandwich? But your stomach probably also says that those sound like the last three years of University eats.

It seems as if students spend half their time searching for some new taste, something tantalizing to their taste buds or pleasing to their palates. Then, over spring break, presto! Like magic, Starbucks and Cucina! Presto! appear in the night to take their place on the corner of Alder Street and 13th Avenue.

A little variety never hurt any student looking for a quick bite on the go. Cucina! Presto! may not replace your Italian mother's cooking or take you back to that summer vacation in Italy, but it does promise to bring students a hot plate of pasta and a bread stick to boot in less than five minutes.

Cucina! Presto!, translated as "quick kitchen," promises quality with a quickness, according to general manager Julie Baliva. She has owned and run restaurants all over the United States and has managed Cucina! Presto! and Café stores for over two years.

"There's too much repetition around college campuses," she said. "People don't always want

to eat at Taco Bell."

Unique aspects of Cucina's menu include goat cheese and artichoke pizza with pesto and pine nuts and imported Italian lager. The Italian sandwiches range from meatball and Italian sausage to paninos — a form of Italian flat bread wrapped around chicken, veggies or pepperoni and cheese pesto. The prices range from \$3.79 for a meatball sandwich to \$5.99 for a plate of spaghetti puttanesca with rock shrimp, olives, capers and artichoke hearts.

Most of the pasta dishes are spiced up with special additions such as sauteed peppers, sundried tomatoes, ricotta and bolognese, depending on your preference. But I can vouch that Cucina's does have identifiable vegetables in the fettucine with roasted eggplant, carrots, mushrooms, tomatoes and broccoli. Cucina also roasts their garlic to make garlic oil.

The wood-fired 9 inch pizzas include varieties such as: basic cheese, veggie, BBQ chicken, pepperoni, sausage and mushroom, and the illustrious goat cheese and artichoke pizza with pesto and pine nuts. The Eugene store uses oak to fire up the dough because wood-fired pizzas have more flavor, Balvia explained.

I have heard from other students that Cucina gets kudos for their minestrone soup, which has awesome croutons that soak all the stuff up.

Salads include Caesar, chicken Caesar, Asian chicken salad, mixed greens and the famous

chopped salad. The chopped salad includes chicken, salami, lettuce, tomatoes, basil, garbanzo beans, scallions, provolone, mozzarella and vinaigrette.

For those watching their weight, the menu boasts some items with less than 30 percent of calories from fat. The pizzas can be made with low-fat mozzarella and the salads can be drenched in fat-free Caesar dressing.

The best deals for a meager college wage are the presto combos. For \$5 to \$6, a student can purchase a pepperoni, sausage and mushroom pizza and salad; an Italian sausage sandwich and salad; penne with bolognese meat sauce and a side caesar salad; or minestrone soup and a side of chopped salad with a bread stick.

For those looking to feed the masses, family meal choices are available. The \$10 to \$14 meals serve two to three people, and the \$19 to \$27 meals feed four or five.

Cucina! Presto! is open Monday through Saturday from 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. and on Sundays from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. Live local music is featured on Saturday around 8 p.m.

We're talking food, folks — something different when the noon hour strikes. Students will need to eat every day, and sometimes a plate of pasta with some goat cheese and chicken might hit the spot. Cucina! Presto! is just another stop on the way to class, or maybe even an excuse not to go at all.

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