

## Brand new Oak & Olive Ristorante offers Italian fare in Hillsdale

### RESTAURANT REVIEW

By Lee Braymen-Cleary  
The Southwest Portland Post

On April 24, Maria Rosengreen proudly opened doors of her Oak & Olive Ristorante situated at 6363 SW Capitol Highway. Featuring Italian eats like *nonna* (grandma) used to make, its brand new building was a long time coming.

But potential diners' interest was piqued; the place has all but overflowed from the get-go. I, for one, have eaten there several times, my eyes taking in the restaurant's clean Modern Italian country decor and the inspired 12-foot-high chalkboard that entertains creative children as their parents wait for orders.

"We're excited to be part of this neighborhood," said Rosengreen, who lives nearby with her husband and her own children. She named her family-oriented eatery a "*ristorante*" rather than "*trattoria*" or "*osteria*," all of which, she said "share overlapping features."

Today Rosengreen with her years of experience in restaurants puts in 10-hour days. "I don't ask crazy prices," she states. "This is a family restaurant serving good meals from various Italian regions. Taste and health are important, so we use fresh local ingredients. Our pork, for instance, comes from Carlton Farms."

Their eat-in/take-out lunch and dinner menu features salads, sandwiches, pizzas, pastas, entrees, not to mention desserts, Italian beers and wines and "*bambini*" (a menu for children under 12).

Customers can select from six eye-catching salads housed in a glass cooler. I chose their tasty, \$10 large-enough-for-four signature Oak & Olive salad.

This romaine-based mélange includes house-marinated ricotta, red pepper, cucumber, carrot, fresh herb vinaigrette. Large green olives and mini-tomatoes sliced lengthwise add an elegant touch.

"Everything is made in-house except for the sandwich bread," said Rosengreen. Executive Chef Cody Lucchesi makes the pastas and pizza doughs, sorbets, gelatos, salads, soups and entrees.

Los Angeles-born Lucchesi, who worked for Southern California's classic, classy French fine dining restaurants and most recently for Portland's South Park now revisits his culinary childhood *con brio*.

A warm, low-key man, Lucchesi delights in preparing Italian family fare. "My Italian grandmother taught me to love food with her Italian home cooking when I was five and six and seven..."

Lucchesi takes pride in the ristorante's six pizza varieties making up 40 to 50 percent of business. They range in price from \$11 to \$15.

"These are artisan pizzas baked in a Washington-made wood stone oven. We use a thin crust and traditional, fresh ingredients for Italian style—not American style—pizzas."

Those pizzas include "*Formaggio*" (all cheese); roasted garlic; olive; Italian with pepperoni, salami, chilies and mozzarella; the classic "*Margherita*"; and a "*Picnic*" with mozzarella, arugula, apples, pancetta and pickled mustard seeds. Anchovies and arugula can be added for \$3 each.

Feeling adventurous, I tried a "*Picnic*." What a nice surprise. A light sweet/savory pizza with that touch



Unusual Italian country lighting can be seen at Oak & Olive Ristorante in Hillsdale. (Post photo by Lee Braymen-Cleary)

of apple, it can serve as a main course or as an appetizer or, at my house, a breakfast! Its *pancetta* isn't the thin stuff you buy packaged at the market, but rather the thicker, chopped variety that says "bacon."

Then there was the lasagna! For \$13 I received a piece that easily serves two. If their pizza is light, so too is this multi-layered concoction. It was cheesy, yes, but in the good sense. Fresh tomato and basil definitely got their say.

If it is not particularly spicy, it is also not heavy, not settling like glue in the stomach. This, I think, is the lasagna to introduce to children. Not that you

wouldn't like it yourself if you shun the very spicy.

I've eaten from the entrée menu twice, too. First it was the lamb *osso bucco* for a reasonable \$16. Served over creamy polenta with mildish Italian flavors, it was as intended—a comfort.

Apparently, this *osso bucco* sells out midway through each evening. My only criticism is that my serving was too well done to my taste. Maybe it sat under the warming lights too long.

The roasted trout was also tasty, good sized and interesting served on a bed of finely diced zucchini caponata along with pine nuts and herb butter. I gobbled, but again, I thought it slightly overdone.

Oak & Olive is currently open from 11:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m., but plans to

extend hours are in the offing. "We will open at 8 a.m. soon. We won't offer a large breakfast menu, but I'll be making an Italian-style quiche," says Lucchesi.

And Rosengreen is eager to offer an early morning gathering time for mothers with kids meeting other mothers with kids.

For now, the establishment offers early comers a coffee bar manned by barista Adam

Brown. I tried his tasty Café Umbria brand coffee and liked its richness. I also liked his biscotti. His quite crunchy chocolate espresso cookie was good, too. But because I like chewy cookies, it was not quite my bag. It could easily be yours, though.

If you like wholesome and interesting Italian cuisine, visit the Oak & Olive. And don't forget dessert. I tried *affogatto*. That's olive oil gelato with espresso! Way too cool!

For all of the restaurant's Old World charm, modernity makes ordering take-out or eat-in a snap. You can order and pay online at [www.oakandolivepdx.com](http://www.oakandolivepdx.com). And there's more. Soon their new, electric Fiat will thread through neighborhoods delivering not only pizza but also full meals.



Restaurateur Maria Rosengreen and Chef Cody Lucchesi team up to bring Hillsdale its own family-style Italian meals at Oak & Olive Ristorante. (Post photo by Lee Braymen-Cleary)

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