

A Crush on the New Kid

Reviews and news of our favorite local eateries.

Manola's Thai Cuisine

652 E. Broadway. 342-6666

Eugene's got the hots for Thai food. Lemongrass, kaffir lime leaves, creamy coconut, curries, galanka root ... exotic fragrances that transport us on spring breezes to Epicurean fantasy islands. And any new restaurant is guaranteed to pique our curiosity and taste buds. The new kid in town now is Manola's.

It's in the former Shanghai Chinese restaurant spot, on the stretch of Broadway that turns into Franklin. Its sign is pink and bright green, bold and blaring, but inside, the experience is more subtle. A gilt dragon and phoenix screen greets you, and fichus trees create a lush, close atmosphere. The walls have been redone in a deep orangy-red, with royal blue silk accents. Taking a hint from Cafe Lucky Noodle, Manola's uses cool light fixtures, including frosty blue lights lining the windows, to update the look of the whole place.

Of course, food is of the essence: A place has to be more than just eye candy to keep the romance alive. The menu is well rounded, beginning with the traditional offerings and adding a vegetarian section at the end. Wines and bar drinks are also available (I try someone's Thai Stoli, Thai iced tea with Stoli's — new to me!)

Appetizers include a generous plate of Thai Spring Rolls, \$5.95, with a mild plum dipping sauce. Chunks of fresh cucumber in the sauce are a pleasant touch and enhance the sauce's sweetness.

One refreshing thing is the number of salads on the menu: spicy Grapefruit Salad, Yum Pla Muk with squid, Pineapple Noodles Salad with coconut milk and fresh ginger. Perhaps a nod to Dr. Atkins? My favorite dish from the now closed Bamboo is a salad called Som Tum, or green papaya salad — Manola's version, \$8.95, with BBQ chicken and sticky rice, or \$7.95 vegetarian.

In the mood for a mild curry, I ask the waiter for a recommendation. He actually brings a sample of the peanut sauce curry to taste, and it is lovely. (The service is quick, especially in the early evening before all the tables fill, though by the time I get the check the place is packed and the waiter a little more harried).

The Peanut Sauce Curry, \$9.95, is a one-star spicy dish, which here means the burn doesn't start until you're a couple bites in, and keeps you flushed and warm for the rest of the evening. The veggies are nice — especially the thin-cut, scalloped-edged carrots — though angel hair noodles are never my fa-

vorite. With the thick peanut sauce they get a little gummy.

The Garlic Green Beans, \$8.95, are something special. At my table, we fight over the last bits, especially the tender sauce-saturated tofu — salty, spicy, rich. Oh, I'm hungry again. Hopefully fresher green beans will be found as the season progresses, but in the sauce and tofu no fault can be found. I can't wait to try the Ginger Tofu.

Dessert isn't out of the question at the end of the meal, especially for the members of our party under 12, so we try the homemade coconut ice cream, made with thick, tender, toothsome chunks of real coconut — very nice.

What starts as flirtatious curiosity just might lead Eugene to true love...

Manola's doesn't cut many corners: Sauces are made fresh, in house, the food is well thought out, and the prices are reasonable. During our meal, the place slowly fills with familiar Eugene faces. What starts as flirtatious curiosity just might lead Eugene to true love with another great Thai restaurant.

11 am-10 pm M-F, noon-10 pm Sa, noon-9 pm Su.
No Checks, \$-\$\$.

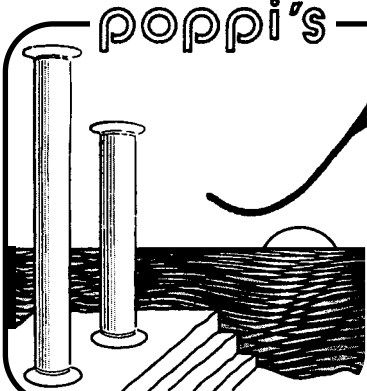
EW

Leftovers

• It's official: Jennifer Jarmin, Summer Spinner and Mieke Stevens, co-owners of Whiteaker's BabyCakes Café, are trading the hectic world of restaurant ownership for the equally (if not more) hectic world of full-time motherhood. The women have sold the café to Richard Satnick of Portland and soon-to-be local co-owner Steve Metz.

Satnick, owner of Laughing Planet on Belmont Avenue in Portland, is stoked on the Eugene venture. "Eugene is a city with consciousness about food and getting off the national food grid," he says. Laughing Planet Portland is a vegetarian- and vegan-friendly joint specializing in burritos and salads — "healthy, good, wholesome food for people on the go," says Satnick. He adds, "We think we're going to learn a lot here ... we're looking forward to hooking up and working with local farmers." — *Bobbie Willis*

• Check out the menu changes at Taco Loco — free chips and salsa to start your meal and new low-carb options. — *BW*



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