



**Chef Walid
"Willie" Saleeby
at work in The
Campbell
House Inn**

PHOTO BY TRASK BEDORTHA

ROOM WITH A VIEW

*The Campbell House Inn welcome
local favorite Willie's* BY AARON RAGAN-FORE

Hey foodies, have you heard? Willie's is back. Gourmands will find that one of Eugene's newest fine dining venues brings with it a familiar menu, a familiar name and, happily, the familiar face of Walid "Willie" Saleeby, a local master chef reviving his signature restaurant in the dining room of Eugene's Campbell House Inn.

Saleeby's much-loved former restaurant, Willie's on 7th, was housed downtown in a well-kept, converted Victorian home, with an upper-crust ambience to match. The former incarnation of Willie's featured an eclectic Northwest gourmet menu from 1982 until 2008, when the space was sold and converted into a cosmetology school.

"We tried to buy the property for years and years," says Saleeby. "When they decided to sell it, it was priced way, way above where it was appraised at," placing it out of Saleeby's reach. Since then Saleeby experimented with other restaurants, including A Change of Heart Bistro in the Southtowne Shops and the Waterfront on Centennial, both now closed.

Enter Myra Plant, owner of the Campbell House. "I've known Walid since I was in high school," she says. "He's been a mentor of mine. He's always taken me under his wing, and when I opened the inn he helped me on the business side."

Earlier, Plant had made the difficult decision to close the inn's kitchen due to the economic downturn, and was happy to learn that Saleeby was interested in bringing the kitchen back to life. After try-out dates in the Campbell House on Thanksgiving of last year, then on New Year's Eve and Valentine's Day of this year, an ongoing partnership was born at the end of February.

"He's got such a known name, and it feels so much like Willie's on 7th, that to me it just seems like a perfect marriage," says Plant.

One thing can be said of Willie's menu: This is decidedly a place for carnivores, with just one vegetarian entree on the menu. Fans of Willie's previous menu will find plenty of familiar dishes, including a flavorful rack of lamb and an extremely tender 10-ounce New York steak. Appetizers include a melt-in-your-mouth whole boneless quail. Many of the dishes are accompanied by crisp mixed vegetables. The service is friendly, and Saleeby enjoys making the rounds of diners, stopping to say hello at each table.

The quail and other meat dishes can all be enjoyed with an expansive wine list rounding out the experience. Saleeby is currently pursuing a liquor license, and the restaurant also offers catering.

Saleeby and his culinary skills are a fixture in Eugene. He first moved to town from his native Lebanon more than four decades ago to attend the UO. Since then, he's raised children (as well as several restaurants) in town.

"One of the things I'm extremely delighted about is seeing some of the old customers come back," says Saleeby. "That's extremely gratifying. The other satisfaction is, I'm getting to do what I want to do."

And he's doing it in a constricted space. "That kitchen is not a commercial kitchen," Plant says of the refurbished facilities originally constructed in 1892, "so you have to be very creative."

Saleeby agrees, noting that, "it's a small restaurant, a small menu, that allows me to play with it on a regular basis."

"The fact that I'm open only at dinner gives me the whole day to do my research," he continues. "If I want work on a recipe, I can."

Saleeby's long term vision for his new venture is to recapture the graciousness and ambience of Willie's on 7th, and it seems he's well on his way. "The house up there kind of lends itself to the same atmosphere we had at Willie's," he says, "but with a much nicer view." ■

Willie's at the Campbell House, 252 Pearl St.; 343-1119; open 5-9 pm T-Th.; 5-10 pm Fri. & Sat.

Your Favorite Local Dealer
For Over 40 Years

CURTIS
RESTAURANT EQUIPMENT
Foodservice Equipment
Design • Supplies

Remember to DINE OUT!

robot coupe

"The inventor & world
leader in
food processors"

*** OPEN TO THE PUBLIC ***

8:00 am to 5:00 pm M—F
555 Shelley Street, Springfield
Ph: 541-746-7480

cinnamon rolls

cupcakes

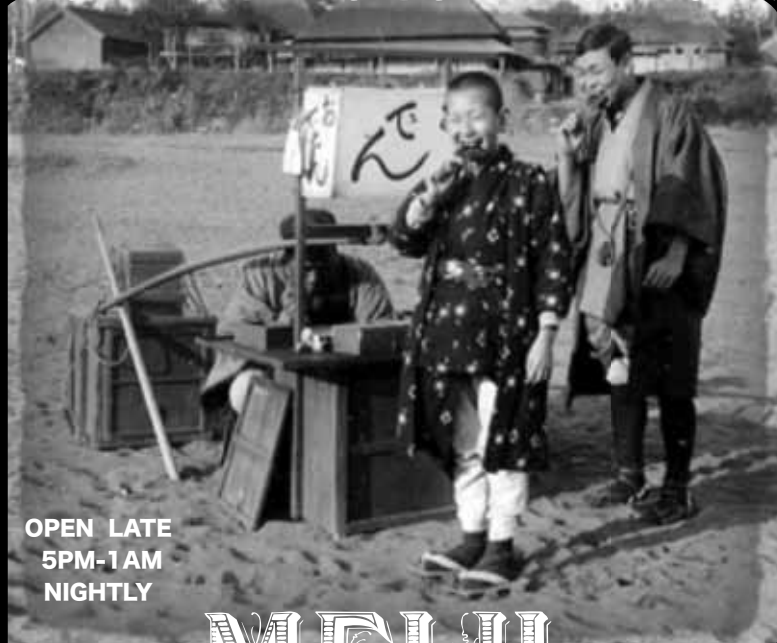
S & L
Patisserie
755 Monroe St

nipples of venus

Birthday

BEST OF
EUGENE
2010-2011

JAPANESE COMMONER CUISINE · SAKE · WHISKEY · COCKTAILS



OPEN LATE
5PM-1AM
NIGHTLY

IZAKAYA **MEIJI** COMPANY

345 VAN BUREN · 541-505-8804 · izakayameiji.com