

Old Favorites

PAYING TRIBUTE TO THE CITY'S CULINARY STRONGHOLDS BY AMY SCHNEIDER

EW

often writes about the new and shiny. Readers and writers alike take interest in stories describing the latest food trends or the most recent restaurants to hit town.

But sometimes, there's value in taking a look back at the restaurants that have stood the test of time. The restaurant business has a high rate of turnover, and a trendy new place might close a month after it opens.

Established restaurants, on the other hand, embed in the collective memory of their customers. These restaurants become members of the community, places well-known and respected, repeatedly visited and fondly embraced.

This is a look at five classic restaurants that enjoy a heritage of longevity, at least for Eugene. It is certainly not a comprehensive or historical recounting of the oldest Eugene restaurants.

Having said that, if you have suggestions for restaurants to include in the sequel, please email food@eugeneweekly.com.

CAFE SORIAH

384 W. 13th Ave. • 541-342-4410

Tiny Cafe Soriah first opened in 1993, and it's been a dining standby in Eugene ever since. In part, this is due to the warm, friendly nature of its owner, Ibrahim Hamide, who has stuck by the business since the beginning.

"I'm the one that started it, and I'm here six days a week," Hamide says. "That consistency and building of relationships is extremely vital because it goes beyond somebody filling their tummy with good food."

Cafe Soriah's classy Mediterranean menu features rich entrees, including lamb, Greek seafood and steak, as well as tasty souvlaki, tandoori beef skewer and baba ghanouj.

Long-standing restaurants cultivate a personal history with customers, a feat difficult to accomplish any other way. "Our 22 years have brought us a lot of regular customers and their offspring and friends," Hamide says. "That loyalty is something I'm in awe of."

Hamide says construction is underway to expand Cafe Soriah into its neighboring building, and for anyone who's waited to get a table, it's news worth celebrating.

OREGON ELECTRIC STATION

27 E. 5th Ave. • 541-485-4444

When Raffaele Ruggeri took ownership of Oregon Electric Station in 2014, he knew he was inheriting a restaurant with a legacy. Built in 1914, Oregon Electric Station once housed a train station and has been a restaurant since 1977.

"I have known people who had their high school graduation dinner here and are now coming with their grandkids," Ruggeri says. "There is a tradition that rests here."

He says he loves hearing stories of past experiences at Oregon Electric Station, everything from Valentine's dates and proposals to anniversary dinners and family celebrations.

The menu at Oregon Electric Station has changed over the years, and when Ruggeri took over, the food offerings rounded a new corner. The restaurant currently serves an array of classics: fettuccine alfredo, lamb shank, clam linguine and other sumptuous dishes.

"I've only been here for three years, but my life has completely shifted for this community and its people," Ruggeri says. "It is the most elegant place."

BEPPE & GIANNI'S TRATTORIA

1646 E. 19th Ave. • 541-683-6661

Owner Beppe Macchi says Beppe & Gianni's is best known for its "quality of food, quality of service and its atmosphere."

The restaurant, discreetly tucked away on 19th Avenue near campus, has served legendary Italian meals since 1998 — think fresh, handmade pasta accompanied by savory cheeses and perfectly paired wine.

Beppe & Gianni's has hosted a wide range of customers over its 17 years in business, including loyal followers who come to the restaurant every other night.

Don't miss out on wine tastings and wine-maker nights, Macchi says, adding that ultimately, an experience at Beppe & Gianni's is all about keeping it simple and enjoying what life has to offer.

"Simplicity is the most important thing," he says.

POPPI'S ANATOLIA

992 Willamette Street • 541-343-9661

Known for its consistently tasty Greek and Indian fare, Poppi's Anatolia has endured because of its reliability, says owner George Schaefer.

"We're fairly predictable and we don't try to change the menu every week," Schaefer says. "For our customers, it's comforting to have the same thing they remember from 10 or 15 years ago or more."

The original Poppi's Anatolia operated near the UO campus on the corner of 13th and Hilyard during the 1970s, back when Poppi herself ran the show, and the restaurant's current location on Willamette Street in downtown Eugene popped up in 1988.

Poppi's menu is a bonanza of favorites: spanakopita, chicken curry, moussaka and baklava, all made to delicious and dependable perfection.

"We kind of pride ourselves on not changing too much," Schaefer says.



PHOTO COURTESY MARCHÉ

MARCHÉ'S SPRING SALMON PLATE

MARCHÉ

296 E. 5th Ave., Ste. 128 • 541-342-3612

Founding chef Stephanie Pearl Kimmel opened Marché in 1998, imbuing the restaurant with a vision based on the farm-to-table movement.

Marché focuses on local food available through Lane County farmers and ranchers while also celebrating the seasons, says Jessica Blaine, Marché's creative director.

"It's the French idea that you're celebrating something every season — truffles in January or wild mushrooms in September," Blaine says. "Marché has relied on the philosophy of making delicious, simple, French-inspired meals."

Marché is known citywide as an elegant place for lunch or a classy option for dinner, and while its menu changes with the season, it's currently offering seared tuna, grilled beef tenderloin and roasted duck breast.

Blaine says Marché is a place for every situation, from brunch with family to special occasions.

"I think that's part of what a good restaurant is about — celebrating life and its milestones together," Blaine says.

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