

thought for food

There's no place like Roma

by Vicki L. Blanchfield
FOR THE WEEKLY

From time to time I stumble upon restaurant stand-outs hidden in strip shopping centers. Recently, I discovered yet another gem - Roma Ristorante Italiano - tucked on the outskirts of downtown Apopka on U.S. 441.

Its weathered, traditional Italian facade belies a quaint pastel interior that, though not heavily themed, is appealing to the eye. In fact, the overall ambience is warm and cozy.

Lighting is subdued, even during the lunch hour. A family portrait hangs proudly over the cash register. Seating is informal, with vinyl tablecloths. Lilac stucco walls and assorted silk floral arrangements scattered throughout the series of intimate dining rooms were juxtaposed, at least on my visit, with balloons and other decorations promoting the restaurant's 30th anniversary.

Based upon that visit, it's easy to see why Roma's has been popular for so long despite its off-the-beaten-path location. The staff was friendly and accommodating, from host to server. The

food - with one minor exception - was outstanding and reasonably priced. And service was speedy.

The lunch menu features a handful of baked parmigiana pasta dishes, anti-pasto for one, a soup and garden salad combo, and such open-faced sandwiches as sausage, eggplant and meatball. Prices range from \$4.50 to \$6.50 and include bread and a tossed salad. Diners may also elect to order from the dinner menu, which offers a more extensive variety of pasta dishes, as well as chicken, veal, seafood and steak (\$8-\$14).

Our orders were taken promptly and the courses were presented in timely fashion. Perhaps this was due, in part, to the novel use of a stainless steel serving cart for food deliveries.

The warm, homemade Italian bread was heavenly. Our salads were fresh and pretty, with a collection of shredded cabbage and lettuce, tomato and onion. The house Italian dressing was too tart and vinegary for me, though.

My combination platter (\$6.50) was baked en casserole, but my server removed it for me tableside. The medley of manicotti, eggplant and thin spaghetti parmigiana was delicious, light yet well-seasoned. I also enjoyed the generous blanket of melted cheese on top of the generously portioned dish.



photo by C. Jordan Harris

AN INSTITUTION for Italian fare, Roma Ristorante is celebrating its 30th anniversary.

My dining companion, meanwhile, savored her baked ziti (\$5.75), also flavorful and healthy in size.

We left room for dessert, which consisted of either spumoni, tiramisu or flan. I opted for the latter. The custard, bathed in a pool of rich caramel sauce (\$3.25), was heavenly. The spumoni slice (\$2.25) was a refreshing frozen rainbow of green and pink ice cream sandwiching a white layer of candied cherry whipped cream.

Aside from the overly tangy salad dressing, my only beef with Roma's was a discrepancy between the menu price (\$2.95) of the flan and the price posted on my bill (\$3.25). I guess they need to up-

date their menus as an anniversary gift to themselves.

(Reviewers for THE WEEKLY eat anonymously at featured restaurants.)

ROMA RISTORANTE

Food	★★★★
Ambience	★★★1/2
Service	★★★1/2

(out of five)

Family restaurant celebrating its 30th anniversary

ADDRESS: 730 Orange Blossom Trail, Apopka

PHONE: 886-2360

PRICE: \$4.50-\$6.50

CARDS: D, MC, V