

RESTAURANT REVIEW

Fiorella/Lake Worth



By Judith Stocks
Dining Correspondent

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Seems as if residents of the Charleston Shores area have been keeping their favorite Italian restaurant a secret.

Not that I want to take the heat for busting the neighborhood party, but it's easy to understand why Fiorella Italian Restaurant and Pizzeria is so popular. The ambience is kind to the senses with soft colors; the kitchen pumps out full-flavored, well-prepared food in nice portions; the wine selection is above average, and, there's Fiorella.

Fiorella Guardascione spends most of her time as a reassuring presence in the three dining rooms, popping into the kitchen now and then, watching over the place as if she owned it. She does. Along with her husband, Franco, his brother Mike (the pizza guy) and his wife, Silvana. Franco and Mike keep the back of the house on its toes, but the foursome gets collective high marks for running a highly efficient restaurant. Savvy servers, assisted by runners who deliver the kitchen's wares, whisk away dirty dishes quick as a wink, keep water glasses filled, and spout off evening specials such as osso buco, Chilean sea bass and fresh yellowtail snapper. It's a restaurant designed to be all things to all people. You want pizza, calzones, strombolis? Meal-sized salads? Rack of lamb? Zuppa di pesce? It's here.

Start with the caprese (\$9.95) for fluffy homemade motz, sliced tomatoes, fresh basil and excellent house-roasted red pepper strips. Clams on the shell (\$10.95) brings a baker's dozen of fresh little necks sautéed in white wine sauce.

Nicely cooked pastas yield to the bite – my favorite is the gnocchi (\$14.95). The uneven pieces and fabulous texture tell you it's homemade. You can order it with a choice of sauces, but I can't wait to go back for more gorgonzola sauce – delightfully creamy yet not overly cheesy – just unabashed satisfaction in each bite. Ditto on any veal dish. We sampled scallopini marsala (\$18.95), and delighted in fork-tender, high-quality meat cut from top rounds. Fresh mushrooms and a delicate wine-influenced sauce create a good interpretation of a classic.

I like a menu offering the option of having certain dishes containing protein available on the bone or boneless. So it goes with chicken scarpariello (\$16.95), a heady version thanks to the addition of balsamic to a garlic white wine sauce that transitions chicken, sweet Italian sausage and fresh mushrooms into a delicious destination.

A garlicky fresh parsley sauce is ladled over the house specialty six-chop rack of lamb (\$21) grilled exactly to the temperature you like. For shrimp francese (\$21.95), the chef dips four huge shrimp into a gentle egg batter seconds before pan frying them to golden, taking care not to overcook them. The sauce is so buttery it's almost creamy. Side pastas are barely stained with a light tomato sauce that seems utilitarian compared to the rest of the food. Entrees are served with a bowl of soup or salad and garlic rolls.

The best dessert is the homemade Italian cheesecake. The essence of oranges richly scents a moist ricotta filling. If chocolate pulses your palate, the chocolate bomb is the bomb all right – chocolate cake with chocolate in between, on top, and everywhere else. Pleasant tiramisu dotted with chocolate chips is also made in house. All desserts are \$5.95.

This friendly restaurant that merits its popularity deserves more than 15 minutes of fame. It's run by a family for your family, so bring the bambinos, too.

RESTAURANT INFO

Cuisine: Italian

7008 Charleston Shores Blvd., Lake Worth
561-963-4999

Cost: inexpensive to moderate

Credit cards: all major

Hours: lunch Monday – Saturday, dinner nightly

Reservations: accepted for five or more

Sound level: moderate

Bar: full service

Smoking: prohibited

Wheelchair accessible: yes

Children's facilities: boosters, high chairs

Please phone in advance to confirm information on hours, prices, menu items and facilities. For review consideration, please fax a current menu that includes name and addresses of restaurant to 954-356-4386 or send to Sun-Sentinel, 200 E. Las Olas Blvd., Fort Lauderdale, FL 33301-2293.

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