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Lake Country Reporter

Zesti brings flavors of the world to Hartland



A lunch crowd fills Zesti in Hartland. The owner of the new restaurant presents a wide-range of dishes that highlight many of the countries he has visited. Photo By Sheila Nero

By SHEILA NERO

Feb. 14, 2015

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Well-known local chef and restaurateur Michael Feker wants to make food experiences so accessible that he installed a window looking into his kitchen at his new restaurant, Zesti, which held its grand opening on Jan. 13.

Zesti's menu is itself a window to cuisine from Italy, France, Argentina, Vietnam, Cuba, Turkey and Germany, among other countries.

"My travels are the foundation of who I am as a chef," Feker said.

He intends for his menu to be a passport for diners who want to try new flavors.

"Flavor moments" are at the core of Feker's food experiences.

"A flavor moment is an 'aha' moment when the food hits the right notes on your palate," he said. "It's the perfect chemistry of flavor, seasoning, ingredients, cooking and texture."

There's also the precise instant when diners savor the moment.

The atmosphere

Zesti, 130 E. Capitol Drive, Hartland, has a Third Ward vibe and a lively yet understated tone. Brick walls, minimalist black light fixtures and a rustic beamed ceiling create a quiet backdrop for the colorful food.

In the expressive tradition of a European café, with no booth walls or separate dining rooms, every table can be seen. Diners' conversations create a relaxed hum. The space will open up even more when the weather warms, as sidewalk seating will be added.

The menu

Feker's international menu, posted at www.zestieatery.com, shows his creativity. For instance, grilled cactus is served with the dinner entrée Pollo Infundido con Especies, a 12-spice rubbed boneless half organic chicken.

Pasta, salads and pizza are served at both lunch and dinner. Lunch sandwiches range from the Banh Mi (Vietnam) to Steak Gatsby (South Africa) and a Chuck Burger. The Sunday Brunch menu lists Torrijas, which is Spanish-style French toast, along with a roasted duck and goat cheese quiche and an All-American bacon and eggs choice, among others.

The background

The phrase "celebrity chef" is often used to describe Feker, who also owns IL MITO Trattoria e Entocca, 6913 W. North Ave., Wauwatosa. Feker, a past nominee for a James Beard award, appears in "Our Dinner Bell" on WISN Channel 12, among other culinary activities. He attended culinary school in San Francisco and studied classical French cuisine. Feker's travels started early; he was born in Iran and lived in Switzerland as a child.

Zesti is a family business. The Feker staff includes his wife, Maricela, and son, Allan, 12, along with nephew Ricardo, an assistant general manager.

The tables

Weekend diners included tables for two to eight people. All ages were at the tables, from an infant to millennials to families with school-age children to seniors. Women wore sweaters over jeans, pants or leggings. Scarves and boots were common. Men wore sweaters or casual shirts with jeans or khakis.

Restaurant Scout profiles Lake Country restaurants to describe ambience, cuisine, price range and clientele. This is a destination feature rather than a food review. Send questions or comments to restaurantscout@gmail.com.

Good to know

What: Zesti

Address: 130 E. Capitol Drive, Hartland

Phone: (262) 367-3333

Fare: Globally inspired

Reservations: Strongly recommended

Hours: Tuesday-Friday: Lunch 11 a.m.-2 p.m. Dinner 5-10 p.m.

Saturday: Lunch 11 a.m.-2 p.m. Dinner 5-11 p.m.

Sunday Brunch: 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Dinner 5-9 p.m.

Price range: Lunch: \$6.95 for Insalata Mista to \$14.95 for Risotto and Seafood Macaroni and Cheese; Brunch: \$7.95 for Cinnamon Flat Bread to \$19.95 for the Family Platter; Dinner: \$5.25 for soup to \$19.95 for Veal Schnitzel and Cote de Boeuf.

Wheelchair access: Yes

Gluten-free options: Yes; \$2-\$3 extra

Website: www.zestieatery.com

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Weekend Happenings

Featured this week:

Family Movie Night: 6 p.m. April 25, Blessed Teresa of Calcutta Parish Center, W314 N7462 Highway 83, North Lake. The movie "Bambi" will start at 6 p.m. Doors open at 5:30 p.m. Free hot dogs and snacks. Children must be accompanied by a parent. Come in comfy clothes and bring a blanket to relax with. RSVP to the parish office at (262) 966-2191 or at www.bteresaparish.org

Poetry Open Mic Night: 7 p.m. April 25, Books & Company, 1039 Summit Ave., Oconomowoc. Celebrate Poetry Month with an evening a poetry. Read your own or a favorite poet, or enjoy listening to others. Free.

The Brew City Rockers: 9 p.m. April 24, Burke's Lakeside, 37238 Valley Road, Oconomowoc. The Brew City Rockers are celebrating spring with a party at Burke's Lakeside. Enjoy a fish fry and stay for the party.

Grow Your Own Salad Gardening Class: 10 a.m. April 25, NuGenesis Farm, N68 W33208 County Road K, Oconomowoc. Join the NuGenesis staff to learn to grow your own delicious and healthy salads at home. \$30 recommended donation. www.nugenesisfarm.org

Updates to this calendar are made weekly Monday afternoon.

All weekend happenings.

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