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Opinion

Restaurant Scout: The Villa at Heaven City restaurant a 'gem'



Villa at Heaven City Chef Robert Klemm takes a break from the kitchen to step behind the bar. Klemm took over the Mukwonago restaurant and bar last June. Photo By Carol Spaeth-Bauer

By Sheila Nero

Feb. 15, 2016

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Executive chef Robert Klemm, the new owner at The Villa at Heaven City in Mukwonago, is hungry for diners' feedback.

"We are constantly asking the local customers what they want," Klemm said. "I have a marketing background, and I want to know my demographic."

On Feb. 3, Klemm posted a new menu on its [Facebook page](#), saying revisions will be implemented this month based on feedback.

Beef Wellington is one popular request so far.

Most recently operated as the Lakeside Supper Club, the restaurant's 1917 art deco interior in the dining room has been preserved down to the light fixtures, along with the focal point of the 99-year-old ceiling-high rubber tree.

"We're classy but not pretentious, kind of a hidden gem," Klemm said. "We're an alternative to driving to downtown Milwaukee for a steak dinner."

A colorful past is part of The Villa at Heaven City.

"It's true," Klemm said, "this building was a brothel."

Outside, a Historical Society marker says, in part: "Buildings were added in the early 1940s ... Lavish accommodations and meals attracted underworld types for getaway weekends."

An Al Capone hangout? A Native American burial ground? Hauntings? Klemm enjoys the lore that came with the property.

The menu

Klemm believes in local sourcing of ingredients. In March, he'll choose seeds for a local farmer to sow for the restaurant. He works with two mushroom foragers, grows an herb garden on the property and shops at farmers markets in Mukwonago and

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Steaks are the most popular entrées at the restaurant.

"We have options and a range to be accessible to everybody," Klemm said.

Offering variety, the restaurant schedules Tapas Tuesday with live flamenco music, Ladies Night Wednesday with live jazz and half-price wine, and Casual Thursday with a three-course meal for \$22.

The Friday fish fry offers a traditional "fish fry" or a "fish try" chef special.

The background

Klemm, who was a consultant with the previous owner, [bought the restaurant in June](#). He has 20 years of experience, including working in Milwaukee with Bartolotta Restaurants.

Jimmy Wade, a past owner and executive chef at Heaven City for 12 years, is Klemm's business partner. Wade is filling a part-time, advisory role at the Villa at Heaven City as a front-of-house liaison to Klemm, who handles the kitchen.

"Jimmy has graciously come out of retirement to work with me as we create the next chapter of Heaven City," Klemm said. "We're connecting the past and present."

The tables

Seating for 140 diners is offered in eight areas, creating a series of smaller dining rooms rather than one large area. Many tables for two are offered, but larger tables are plentiful, too. French doors, a chandelier and fireplace all add to the muted, vintage décor.

An outdoor, fast-casual bistro with its own mini kitchen and menu is being developed. Continuing past practices, the back section of the property is available for weddings.

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

Good to know

WEBSITE: www.thevillahc.com

ADDRESS: S91 W27850, National Ave., Mukwonago

PHONE: (262) 363-9335

FARE: Contemporary steakhouse

RESERVATIONS: Recommended

PRICE RANGE: Starters: \$8 for chicken or vegetable tempura to \$17 for Maine lobster pot stickers; Heaven City Burger, \$15; grilled salmon, \$26; 8-oz. filet, \$35; Cowboy bone-in ribeye, \$48

HOURS: 3:30 p.m. to 9 p.m. Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and 3:30 to 10 p.m. Friday and Saturday. Food service starts at 5 p.m.

ATTIRE: Dressy


GLUTEN-FREE OPTIONS: Yes

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