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Rustic Tavern

By Susie Iventosch



Photo provided

My father-in-law and I finally had the chance to visit Lafayette's Rustic Tavern for dinner a few weeks ago. We enjoyed a fantastic meal and excellent service in the outdoor seating area, and though we were a little skeptical about the cool weather that June evening, the outdoor heaters provided plenty of warmth.

The menu is concise, with just six entrees, but I was happy to see Papa's favorite pasta dish on the menu, a Rustic Tavern version of carbonara. It was different than most pasta carbonara dishes I've seen, because they served a poached egg on top, rather than stirring beaten eggs into the hot pasta after cooking. It was obviously made with wonderful homemade fettucine, which reminded me exactly of the noodles my great Aunt Clara used to make, whenever she babysat my siblings and me. Nostalgia!

I selected the Skuna Bay Salmon, which was nothing short of fabulous and served with a yummy artichoke hash, made with carrots and onions. It was so good that I went home to attempt it myself. Apparently, I didn't detect all of the secret ingredients, because mine was not nearly as good. We also shared the Lacinto Kale Salad, made with kale, currants, farro, tangerine, pine nuts and feta cheese. This salad was fantastic!

Rustic Tavern is owned and operated by Chris Amsden and Tressa and Gary Rust, all friends from their days of working together at Lark Creek in the late '90s and early 2000s. Though they all left Lark Creek to pursue other

ventures, they longed to team up again one day to form their own restaurant. On April 30, they opened the tavern doors and have been very busy serving customers ever since!

While Amsden and Tressa Rust run the front of the house, including the bar and wait staff, Chef Gary Rust heads up the kitchen and menu planning. He employs the "farm to table" philosophy, ordering fresh meats, fish and produce daily. He also tends his own garden, which supplies much of the produce served in the restaurant as well as the honey and herbs that go into the menu.

"Gary buys whole fish and filets them himself," Amsden said. "During crab season, he has a team of people picking fresh crab for our crab cakes."

The trio describes their menu as "Seasonal American Fare" and they have purposely kept the menu small so as to focus on the quality of every dish. Recently, they've offered several well-received luncheon and dinner specials, and they plan to vary the menu according to seasonally available ingredients.

Like any venture, it takes some time to iron out the wrinkles, and it appears to be no different for Rustic Tavern. One of our Lamorinda Weekly editors has had the opportunity to dine here a couple of times, and though she said the first time was a little rough in terms of the service as well as the meal she ordered, she visited a second time and was delighted with the results. She found her meal to be very good and the service great.

On the subject of working out kinks, Papa and I chose to dine outside, because the noise level is fairly high indoors making conversation a bit difficult. But Amsden says they are aware of the issue and are working on plans to improve the acoustics, soon.

Amsden and the Rusts are very pleased with the support the Lamorinda community has shown for their new establishment.

"It has been wonderful to have such a positive turnout of guests so far," Amsden remarked. "We look forward to continuing to make long-lasting friendships for many years, so thank you to all!"

Rustic Tavern
3576 Mt. Diablo Blvd.,
Lafayette
www.rustictavernlafayette.com
(925) 385-0559

For more information on
Skuna Bay Salmon:
<http://www.skunasalmon.com>

Reach the reporter at: suziven@gmail.com

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