

DINING

Red sauce refined

Zuccarelli's joins the PGA corridor with good food, great service

By CHARLES PASSY
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

I live for that pause in a meal when you're shifting from entree to dessert mode. It's a make-or-break moment when a dinner can turn into a feast: There's coffee and maybe something sweet ahead. But to help with the transition, you're going to need a little priming from a restaurant's wait staff.

And it's here where the new Palm Beach Gardens incarnation of Zuccarelli's excels. It's not just that the genteel servers take your dessert order graciously or make sure to clear and decumb the table properly. It's that they understand intuitively that dining is about more than eating. It's really about a night on the town.

I point this out because the food at Zuccarelli's — solid Southern Italian-influenced fare — falls in line with what you'll find in almost any reputable neighborhood red-sauce joint. The problem, I suspect, is that many patrons want that cuisine — call it Italian-American comfort food — but don't care for the no-frills atmosphere inherent in neighborhood dining. Especially when the "neighborhood" is one of those pricey golf-course communities that still hold a certain cachet in these tough economic times.

REVIEW

Zuccarelli's

FOOD: B

SERVICE: A-

ADDRESS: 5530 PGA Blvd., Suite 101 (In PGA Commons West), Palm Beach Gardens

TELEPHONE: (561) 776-9889

WEB SITE:
zuccarellis.com

PRICE RANGE:
Moderate

HOURS: 11 a.m. to 10 p.m., Monday to Thursday; 11 a.m. to 11 p.m., Friday; 4 to 10 p.m., Saturday; 4 to 10 p.m., Sunday.

CREDIT CARDS: MC, V, AmEx

RESERVATIONS:
Accepted for parties of four or more

WHEELCHAIR ACCESS:
yes

WHAT THE GRADES MEAN:

A — Excellent
B — Good
C — Average
D — Poor
F — Don't bother

nearly three decades.) In its recently opened second location in the PGA Commons development, it has gone for a Tuscany-meets-supper-club feel — note the earth-toned walls and the area where a pianist holds court on many nights. The vibe is refined but inviting at the same time, befitting the older clientele that's drawn to the place.

There's a big enough wine list (130 bottles) to find something red, fruity and Italian to enjoy — say, one of several Chiantis — without breaking the bank (meaning lots of bottles priced under \$50). With the nicely chewy bread and fine complimentary salad that comes with entrees, that should be enough to whet most folks' appetites.

If you insist on more, you might be disappointed in the lackluster hot antipasti (\$16.95), which covers the requisite bases of all things stuffed (mushrooms, eggplant, clams, shrimp) but doesn't manage to invest much flavor or appreciation for texture in any of the items. A special of a stuffed artichoke was similarly ho-hum.

But pastas are a better bet. Split a bowl of any of the hefty offerings as a good pre-entree option. One night, we went with the fettucine Bolognese (\$16.95), but our waiter suggested we pair the



DAMON HIGGINS/Staff Photographer

ZUCCARELLI'S PART DEUX: The new Zuccarelli's in PGA Commons West packs them in for a classic red-sauce Italian dining experience. The plus here? The attentive and skilled wait staff.

hearty meat sauce with a hearty pasta — namely, thick bucatini. Sure enough, it was a great combo.

Entrees include all the classics, from veal parmigiana to cioppino. You can't go too wrong with any of them. Chicken parmigiana (\$16.95) benefits from not being overly breaded and comes with pasta smothered in a perfectly sweet marinara. Veal saltimbocca (\$19.95) gets the requisite salty kick from the prosciutto, though I do wish the brown brandy sauce wasn't so thick.

If you're in the mood for something more deftly prepared, I might suggest the

grilled veal chop, a lovely piece of meat that gets the right amount of time — not a minute more or less — on the fire. But unlike the other more reasonably priced entrees (served in portions large enough to guarantee a lunch for the next day), the chop seems overpriced at \$42.95.

With dessert, it's more of the tried and true. Zuccarelli's turns out a worthy tiramisu (\$7). But I took more pleasure in the various gelati (go for the hazelnut) and the tartufo (\$5.95), a chocolate-covered ice-cream confection that always brings visions of the Good Humor man gone Italian to mind.

Of course, before dessert, you can be sure the wait staff will tend to the aforementioned clearing-the-table tasks. The service here is exceptionally polished and stands as proof that there always are good folks waiting to be hired, despite complaints I've heard from local restaurateurs to the contrary.

Indeed, at Zuccarelli's, staffing and atmosphere largely make the meal, though the reheated chicken parm doesn't taste half-bad the next day when you're serving it to yourself. I just miss the extra attention.

©charles_passy@pbpost.com



THOMAS CORDY/Staff Photographer

Spoto's Oyster Bar's clam chowder is a popular dish.

FIVE PLACES... in PGA Commons

Zuccarelli's is the new kid on the block in this Palm Beach Gardens shopping and dining destination. But here are five worthy established ones:

David's East Side Deli: This kosher, truly authentic New York-style deli opened just a few months ago. But it's definitely worth visiting, especially for the delicious, decadently fatty pastrami. 4580 PGA Blvd., No. 109, PGA Commons East; (561) 691-9293; davidseastsidedeli.com.

Spoto's Oyster Bar: Now that the West Palm Beach location of this casual seafood spot has closed, here's where you'll

have to go for all your freshly shucked favorites and other fresh catches. It's particularly a good bet for lunch. 4560 PGA Blvd., PGA Commons East; (561) 776-9448; spotosoysterbar.com.

Spoto's Oakwood Grill: The same quality as the oyster bar, but in a more upscale setting. As the name implies, the culinary emphasis is on grilled fare. Even a simple piece of fish becomes a flavorful pleasure here. 4610 PGA Blvd., No. 100; (561) 776-5778; oakwoodgrill.com.

Panera Bread: Yes, we know: It's just another Panera. But where else are you

going to go when you've got a craving for a cinnamon-crunch bagel or a hearty soup served in a bread bowl? 4540 PGA Blvd., No. 100; (561) 775-3705; panerabread.com.

Sabor Havana Cigars: Not a place to dine, but a perfect place to enjoy a glass of wine or a cup of Cuban coffee before or after the meal. Of course, that's provided you also appreciate a fine smoke. Sabor Havana Cigars, 4530 PGA Blvd., No. 109, PGA Commons East; (561) 626-6700; saborhavanacigars.com.

— Charles Passy