

Viva Tuscany

Indoor-outdoor dining lends villa vibe to Yorktown eatery

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There aren't any rolling green hillsides blanketed with lushly productive olive groves at Brio Tuscan Grille, but that's probably just because there isn't room for them in the available space.

Perched on the western edge of Yorktown Center in Lombard, the themed eatery bears heavy influence from the northwest Italian region of Tuscany, dishing up classic pastas and risottos as well as wood-grilled steaks, chops and other of the area's specialties.

A sprawling sheltered terrace offers al fresco dining for up to about 60 patrons, adding significant capacity to the roomy dining room. Both eating spaces are furnished with touches that evoke the lush and leisure pace of an Italian countryside villa.

Managing partner Chris Nickels said the eatery - the only Illinois location in the company's 30-site chain - has seasonal offerings that sell especially well, such as the traditional mixture of fresh tomatoes, mozzarella and basil known as insalata caprese. One of the grilled entrees, gorgonzola lamb chops, also goes over especially big, Nickels said.

Among the house specialties on the daily menu are a pork chop topped with an herbed artichoke-Boursin crust that comes with a broiled tomato, crispy potatoes, arugula and red wine veal sauce; a chicken breast stuffed with prosciutto and fontina cheese, served with mashed potatoes and vegetables; and a pasta dish highlighted by shrimp, lobster, mushrooms, green onions and a zesty butter sauce.

The expansive menu also features an array of sandwiches, served at lunchtime, that include three kinds of panini and a burger topped with bacon, smoked mozzarella cheese, roasted tomato mayonnaise and onions flavored with pinot noir. Homemade potato chips accompany all of the sandwiches.

A variety of creative salads also are available, such as insalata Roma, a mixture of wood-grilled chicken, gorgonzola cheese, slender green beans, grapes, spiced pecans and Italian dressing. The wood-grilled salmon salad incorporates Roma tomatoes, asparagus, feta cheese, crisp shoestring potatoes and balsamic vinaigrette. Several of the salads are made in different sizes to accommodate the varying appetites of lunch and dinner visitors.

Popular appetizers include the bruschetta, which comes four ways. Patrons can have their toasts topped with a caprese mixture or cheesy shrimp in lobster sherry sauce with charred tomato-cilantro relish, sliced steak with cheeses and vegetables, or roasted peppers with basil, fresh mozzarella and a balsamic drizzle.

On weekends, a special brunch menu offers dishes that include grilled salmon and sweet potato hash; a frittata stuffed with cheeses, pasta, vegetables and bacon; French toast made with brioche, fresh berries and mascarpone cheese; and assorted other made-to-order entrees. Brunch is served until 3 p.m. on Saturdays and Sundays.

Also offered weekly are live music and a \$2 discount on martinis on Thursdays.

A separate catering menu lists 10 house dishes that can be picked up for feeding a crowd, with a 24-hour notice. Full and half-pans of assorted pastas can be ordered, in addition to chicken "under the brick" and other specialties, plus dessert in quantities sufficient to serve up to 20 people