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A TAVERN COMES TO LAKE ANNE

By William Nicoson

Reston's Lake Anne Village Center has been celebrated for the number and quality of its restaurants. Beginning in 2003 the largest of these restaurants, known as Il Cigno (The Swan), specialized in Italian cuisine designed by a highly-regarded chef, Andrea Pace, a graduate of The Excelsior Culinary Institute in Merano, Italy. But the owner of the restaurant, Tony Arbid, invested in a capacious terrace canopy which a number of Lake Anne residents found objectionable. He eventually replaced the canopy with umbrellas but decided to move his restaurant and chef to a Great Falls location known now as Fiora di Luna (Moon Blossom).

Under new management, Il Cigno floundered and late last year closed its doors. The restaurant has now been refurbished, reopened and renamed "Tavern on the Lake" by new owners, Ashwani Ahuja (the owner of two other restaurants) and Omar and Alexis Balkissoon. The menu offers inventive tavern fare.

If you enjoy wine and snacks at odd hours, or for that matter regular hours, the Tapas Menu will lead you to a choice of some 16 light offerings, including Bread & Olives at \$3 (marinated olives and pickles with rustic (crusty) bread), Red Pepper Walnut Hummus at \$4 (chickpea spread on wedges of pita-bread livened by Turkish pepper), Crab Strada at \$6 (blue crabmeat and cheese baked in a savory custard), Calamari at \$7 (fried squid in a garlic mayonnaise known as aioli), and Seared Jumbo Scallops Romesco at \$8 (sea scallops in a sauce with Spanish roasted pepper and almonds).

The Lunch Menu features four first-courses, including a House Salad at \$3.95 (baby greens, red onion, cucumber and grape-tomatoes in a house vinaigrette dressing) and a Crab Vegetable Soup at \$4.25 (rich tomato broth with blue crabmeat and vegetables). Fourteen entrees are listed on the Lunch Menu, including an Avocado Wrap at \$7.95, three kinds of Burgers each at \$7.95, with Blue Cheese and Montreal spice, with Bacon and Cheese, or with Avocado and Tomato, and Pappardelle with Wild Mushrooms at \$9.95 (broad egg noodles with sliced Portabello Mushrooms in a bland cream sauce with white truffle oil).

The Dinner Menu offers the same salads and soups as the Lunch Menu but more complex entrees, except for the Burger with Montreal Spice and Brie Cheese or Bacon Cheddar, priced at \$11.95. Among the outstanding entrees are the "Homestyle" Meatloaf also at \$11.95 with a wild mushroom demi-glace and horseradish mashed potatoes, Short Smoked Salmon at \$17.95 with wilted Arugula (a faintly bitter green resembling dandelion leaves), Seafood Shepherd Pie, also at \$17.95, featuring a casserole of fresh seafood, wild mushrooms and vegetables in cream sauce topped with mashed potatoes), and Porcini Crusted Ribeye Steak at \$24.00, offering dried Porcini (a wild mushroom) and spices coating a steak marinated in a red wine sauce with horseradish mashed potato.

The wine and beer offerings are also promising. 16 oz. Drafts of Bass Ale (my favorite), Sam Adams Spring Ale, Blue Moon and Foggy Bottom Ale are each available for \$4 or, in a pitcher, \$9. Among last week's "Wines of the Week..." at \$4 a glass or \$19 a bottle, were 2002 Dry Creek

Merlot and 2001 Montepulciano d'Abruzzo, 2003 Dry Creek Fume Blanc and 2004 Simi Chardonnay. For 1999 Amarone-Della Valpolicella, the price was \$6 a glass and \$34 a bottle.

The Tavern is equipped with wine cabinets to permit frequent visitors to store their own wine or, for a small fee, to permit partially consumed bottles to be stored for later use.

Welcome, Tavern on the Lake. I'm partial to your style of vittles and vintages.

William Nicoson cares about good cooking and drinking.