

Popular Irish tavern shines after extensive makeover

BY MARY QUINLEY
CORRESPONDENT

There's a new restaurant face with familiar features in downtown Farmington. And, patrons like Tom Buck are impressed.

"They really have done a great job," said Buck, referring to John Cowley & Sons Irish Tavern, formerly Cowley's Old Village Inn. Buck, and his wife, Karen, have visited the eatery several times since it reopened on March 14.

"The restaurant is very different with new furniture and new decor," Buck said. The Farmington couple enjoys sitting upstairs in the pub. "It's been fun and they have great entertainment."

In the past two months, Cowley's has tweaked the menu by lowering some prices and adding new items, hosted wine-tasting parties, and launched a Sunday Champagne Brunch.

"We are concentrating on the product and the service delivery... and, we are adjusting some things like the upstairs acoustics," said Greg Cowley, a partner in the family-owned business.

Prior to undergoing an extensive makeover, including the addition of an upstairs pub, the restaurant featured a 1960s retro ambiance.

If you amble inside today, you'll be treated to a casual, fine-dining atmosphere reminiscent of an Irish public house. Mahogany tables, facades from a European church, and a made-from-scratch mahogany wine bar add an atmosphere of authenticity.

Threads of family traditions add a comfy flavor to the establishment.

"The soda bread is my mom's recipe. She would make it every Saturday and serve it on Sunday morning," Cowley said. Coolhenry, the "entirely non-smoking" downstairs diner, is named after his father's farm in County Carlow, Ireland.

There are two menu options: A pub menu and dinner menu.



Cowley's waitperson Marnie Ruhl offers Dinn Ri, a salad that has a layer of marinated Asian vegetables, spicy Southwestern shrimp and Pacific Northwestern maple-infused pork.

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Greg Cowley
partner, John Cowley & Sons

Both are available upstairs and downstairs, with the exception of sandwiches,

which are not served downstairs.

Salmon dill cakes, paired with course-grain mustard crab cakes, rank as the most popular appetizer. Other starters include escargot in garlic herb butter, a lean loin of rabbit, jerked, skewered and grilled, and, a baked combo of artichokes, spinach and assorted cheeses.

"We sell more of the Dinn Ri salad than any other salad," said Cowley, referring to the medley of marinated Asian veggies topped with spicy shrimp and maple-infused

pork. The uniqueness of the salad is appealing, he said. And, "it's not nearly Irish at all."

The potato soup is a favorite with patrons. "We serve gallons of it," he said. "It's loaded with bacon and cheddar cheese like a baked potato."

Tom Buck likes to order The Detroit. "It's one of the best ham sandwiches I've ever had," he said.

Burgers, grilled chicken breast sandwiches and fish sandwiches are other choices.

Pot of Gold, a traditional Irish stew, is another fave with customers. It's made with

lamb, potatoes and carrots, and seasoned with Guinness.

"Our chef, David Rycerz, is trying hard to emulate some of the freshness of the Irish cooking and, (deal with) the challenge to make sure it's popular," said Cowley.

The three most-ordered entrees are: Leprechauns Tales, a crabmeat-stuffed chicken breast with a wood-fired charred tomato vinaigrette; Gift of the Highlands, 10 ounces of young tender lamb chops; and, the CoolHenry, a woodsy-inspired pork tenderloin seasoned with maple syrup, wal-

JOHN COWLEY & SONS IRISH TAVERN

Where: 33338 Grand River Ave., Farmington, (248) 474-5941

Open: Upstairs pub 11 a.m. to 2 a.m. Monday-Saturday; noon-8 p.m. Sunday. Food served until 10 p.m., appetizers only 10-11 p.m.; entertainment 10 p.m. to 2 a.m. Monday-Saturday. No entertainment on Sunday. Coolhenry, the downstairs dining area, is all non-smoking, including the wine bar. Dinner served 5-10:30 p.m. Monday-Saturday; noon-8 p.m. Sunday. Brunch available noon to 4 p.m. Sunday

Menu: Appetizers, salads, soups, meat and fish entrees, and desserts are served. Twelve varieties of beer and a selection of wines are available.

Cost: Soups \$5.95-\$6.50, appetizers \$6.95-\$10.95, salads \$4.95-\$10.95, Pub sandwiches \$5.95-\$6.95, entrees \$9.95-\$29. Sunday brunch \$7.95-\$13.95

Credit cards: All major credit cards are accepted. Reservations: Not necessary.

nut, thyme and rosemary.

Beef lovers often try the Trio of Filet Mignon. The three, 3-ounce medallions of beef tenderloin can be prepared with a variety of seasonings. You can even add an 8-ounce lobster tail to the trio.

Save space for a luscious dessert. Cheesecake, brownie mousse cake, creme brulee and pecan carrot cake are favorite after-dinner and after-theatre treats.

Mary Quinley is a Livonia resident who writes about food and travel for the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers.