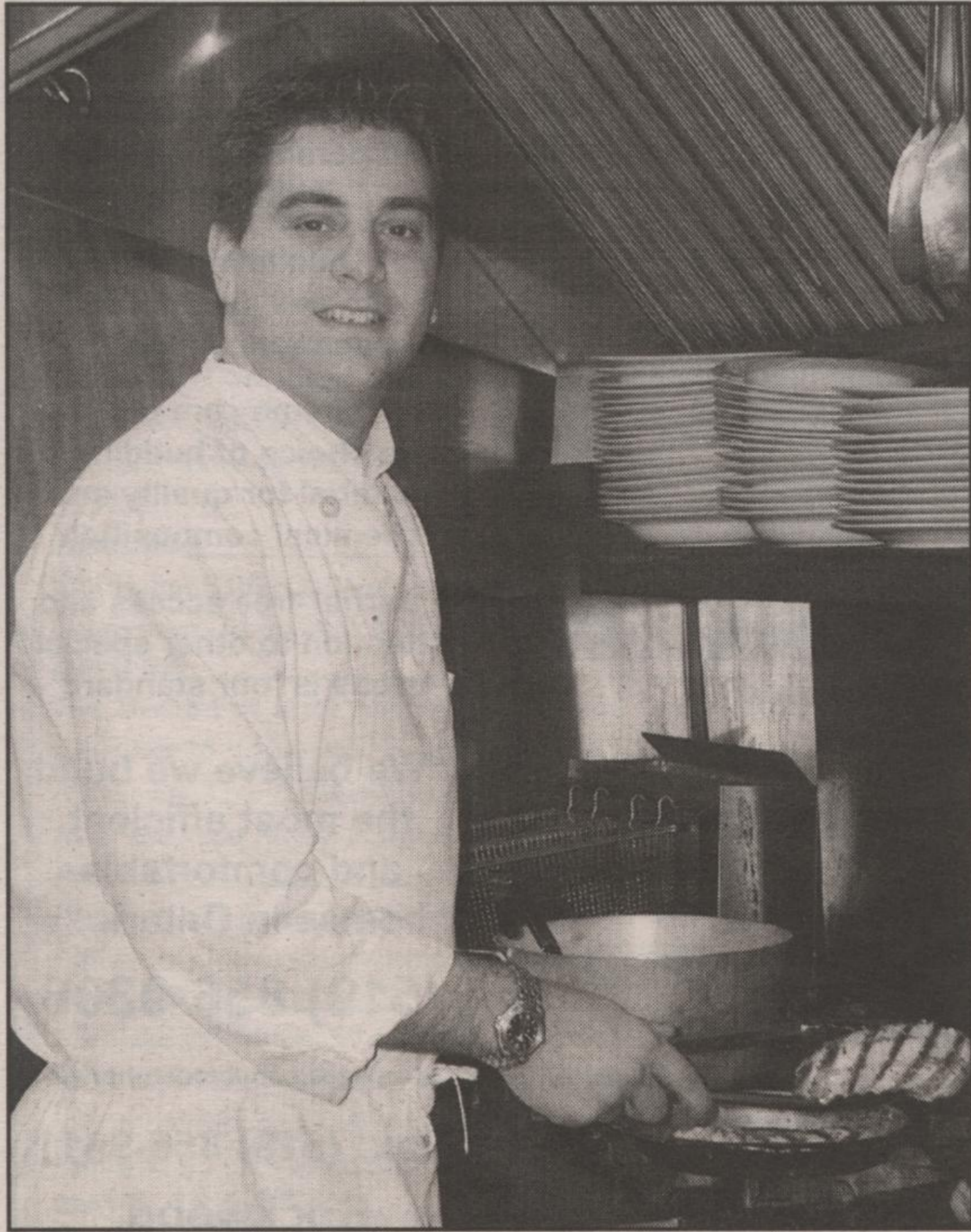


Mattina's Cucina

Fine Italian dining with a casual flair

by Donna Danielli
The Compass



Cooking up something delectable is chef Paul Mattina at Mattina's Cucina.

Photo by Donna Danielli

*S*itting at a table at Mattina's Cucina Ristorante in Georgetown can be so relaxing you almost feel like one of the family. Paul Mattina, proprietor and chef, is highly visible, both in the open concept kitchen and while taking time throughout the evening to visit each table. His wife Cherie greets guests at the door before seating them. A close look at the nook beside the kitchen and you'll see the family trademarks that define Paul's deep sense of family: his grandfather's accordion and carefully framed pictures of his grandparents and great-grandparents. All over his restaurant, Paul points out the small touches and decorations his relatives have contributed: decorations, painting and plain hard

work to prepare the restaurant for opening.

"They have been incredible," says Paul. "Especially my wife, Cherie. This was always my dream and she works so hard to help make it happen for me."

Mattina's Cucina strives to bring uptown to the neighbourhood, proving it's not necessary to leave to find casual fine dining.

"It's hearty Italian, Grandma's Italian cooking with modern technique. It's got variety - something for everyone and everything cooked to order. We try to provide what we like when we go out to dinner."

Approximately 85 per cent of the menu is traditional Italian fare with a gourmet twist. The rest covers such delicacies as seafood appetizers, warm salads with scented

vinegars and oils, daily entree specials such as Arctic char with lobster sauce, tilapia with a lime coconut twist, or rack of lamb. The varied menu places emphasis on the palate and freshness.

"Georgetown was growing and it needed a place for fine dining with a comfy-cozy atmosphere. Someplace fun and relaxing, yet still intimate and romantic. Proper service, which is where Cherie really outdoes herself, is key. You greet customers at the door, you thank them when they leave and in between you make sure they enjoy themselves. Customers feel comfortable where they're made to feel welcome."

Paul is very quick to share credit with the people who help make his ristorante such a success.

"I couldn't do this without my wife and the great staff here. It's like a family. This is a small place and we have fun together. I owe a great deal to my staff. To build that, you need trust and to be honest with them."

Irene Browning, Sous Chef for Mattina's Cucina, can't say enough about her boss.

"He's great to work for. Paul's a lot of fun and he makes the best pastries. The pastry section is the hardest because you need a very fine hand. Pastry is a fine art and requires a real skill. Paul is an artist."

Paul himself is quick to praise the creations of Irene and the Garde Manger Julie Seddon.

"They're really just the best. Irene is absolutely fantastic with seafood."

This hearty, friendly restaurateur, whose career includes work at some of Ontario's finest dining rooms, including Scaramouche, Fenton's, ClubLink, and Milton's Harrop House, can be quite reticent about his own talents.

"When you blow your own horn, you get chapped lips," he

laughs. "It's like painting your own picture: to me, food is my palate. I work the same for myself as I did for other people, my work ethic hasn't changed."

Although Paul's work has been appreciated by such celebrities as John Candy, John Turner and Payner Stewart, he doesn't seem to have changed much from the six-year-old who sneaked into his grandmother's kitchen and empty her spices into a pot of water, all the while stirring and dreaming of the day he'd become a chef. The small boy's zest lives on in the joy he takes in his work.

"I always said that when I had my dream come true, I'd take the time to thank all the people who helped me in some way in my dream. There have been so many, I could take an entire article to name them all. First of all, my wife Cherie. We've been together since high school 18 years ago, and we've had the restaurant a year and a half, without ever a single fight between us. We work together so well and I miss her when she's not here."

Paul is also quick to send his thanks to his family, his friends and business associates.

Mattina's Cucina is open for

dinner Tuesday through Saturday, and lunch is served Tuesday through Friday. The restaurant itself is smoke free, but a lounge is provided for anyone wishing to smoke. The restaurant seats 40 and reservations are recommended for weekend dining as Paul encourages his patrons to linger over their meals, taking the time to savour his creations. This freshness, attention to detail and reputation for excellence is reflected in the Reader's Choice Award for Fine Dining recently presented to Paul by the people of Georgetown.

"Halton Hills is a good community and it inspires me to give my best. This is a risky business. You can have the best food and best location, but you can't tell what will or won't bring people out. I'm lucky. The people here have really welcomed us and we're doing well. The best part though, is working with Cherie... [She] makes the dream come true."

For anyone else, it's the food Paul prepares that is the stuff dreams are made of. Stop by and see for yourself what magic this talented chef can create - you won't be disappointed.



Photo by Donna Danielli



*Paul & Cherie Mattina
Chef / Proprietors*

For reservations call

905-702-8850

99 Mountainview Road North, Georgetown

Hours

CLOSED:
Sunday & Monday

LUNCH:
Tuesday to Friday
12-2 p.m.

DINNER:
Tuesday to Saturday
5 p.m.-last reservation