

Milton • Means Business

Portabello's already looking at expansion

By GILLIAN CORMIER
Special to the Champion

Some people play sports or read in their spare time. Dave and Colleen Strutt opened a restaurant.

It all happened so fast. One day the couple drove by the new plaza at 1580 Derry Rd. and saw a sign for leasing opportunities, and the next thing they knew Portabello's Pizza and Eatery was up and running.

"We recognized an opportunity and decided to go for it," said Mr. Strutt.

The business now occupies their evenings and weekends.

Neither had a background in the food industry when they made the decision to open a restaurant. Mr. Strutt is in industrial parts distribution and Ms Strutt is a flight attendant, but they combined his business savvy and her service expertise to bring something special to the table.

"We see things from the guests' side of the table," said Mr. Strutt. "It's been stressful, but I love it."

The birth of Portabello's is the perfect example of being at the right place at the right time. A risky venture for strangers to the industry, the restaurant opened the first week of May and has already had offers to expand.

The Strutts will decide in the next month if they want to open a second restaurant in the new Mattamy plaza that's planned for Oakville.

After that, opening a location in Cambridge is also a possibility. Portabello's success has been swift and impressive.

Though it tags itself 'Your Neighbourhood Pizza Joint', Portabello's serves up more than pizza. There's a large menu of pastas, sandwiches, salads, seafood items, specialty appetizers and even a cookie dough dessert pizza with its own choice of toppings.

The Strutts' vision was to create a restaurant where pizza was the main menu item, but with a causal dining atmosphere that all could enjoy. They also wanted their restaurant to have a distinct personality that set it apart from big-box franchises elsewhere in town.

Portabello's unique personality includes TVs set up around the dining area that showcase old black-and-white movies and TV shows like I Love Lucy and Andy Griffith. Big Band music also plays softly in the background to entertain guests.

The interior was designed by the Strutts, complete with an open-concept kitchen that allows guest to drink in the fresh aromas and watch chefs cook up a storm.

Ms Strutt made one aspect of the décor her special project — she took it upon herself to make sure the bathrooms were nothing short of breathtaking. There are few neighbourhood pizza joints that feature tall glass basin sinks and glass countertops with artful tiling and trim.

"People remember the bathrooms," said Ms Strutt. "We aim to impress."

A lot of thought went into constructing a comfortable, nostalgic atmosphere. And with three sons in diapers, the Strutts know the importance of creating a family-friendly restaurant.

"In this area, there are so many young families, we wanted to create a restaurant where they would feel welcome," he said. "If a kid comes in and throws a French fry across the dining room, it's okay. But we also want this to be a place where couples can come for their anniversary, open a bottle of wine, sit in a back booth and really enjoy a special evening out. We play up to our guests."

Indeed, Portabello's is a different restaurant at different times of the day. Seven nights a week the patio is packed with patrons, business lunches are common during the afternoon in the wireless-capable dining room, and families typically come in the early evening. Couples are customary later in the evening, and groups of friends looking for a spot to hang out and grab a slice of pizza are common at night.

Portabello's is open from 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. on weekdays, and keeps its doors open until 2 a.m. on weekends.

For take out and delivery, call (905) 878-1933. Copies of the menu are available at www.portabellos.ca.



Colleen and Dave Strutt show some of their restaurant's dishes.

Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

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