

dining around

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Mangia Bene adds a 'wow' to El Cajon dining scene

For diners at Mangia Bene there is but one daunting challenge. How in the world are you supposed to control yourself when the first thing they bring to your table is a basket of incredibly delicious hot-from-the-oven toasted French bread topped with a dash of garlic, parsley, rosemary, thyme, olive oil and Romano cheese?

Control and pace are virtues you must master at this great Italian restaurant in the heart of the new emerging downtown El Cajon — because after the bread you'll still need to enjoy big generous portions of some of the best Italian food around!

The story of this spot evolves around Domenico Donato, an energetic Italian of 71, who came to the U.S. from Calabria, Italy in the early sixties. In 1966 he opened his first restaurant called Mama Rosa in Clairemont that became an instant success. Soon several other locations were opened, some that are still operated by relatives. After a nice solid run in the biz Domenico decided to retire, but as is the case with many restaurateurs the business gets into your blood, and you just can't stay away. Now he is back, helping grandson Lenny operate the beautiful new Mangia Bene at 221 East Main St. (across from East County Performing Arts Center).

The interior is lovely with a courtyard style atmosphere created by faux balconies and beautiful Tuscan wall murals. There are three main dining areas and two outdoor patios. The pretty Wine Room is ideal for parties of 20, while another banquet room can seat up to 50. Clip today's coupon and make your way over soon for a meal you will love. It is all about flavor here, in a big way.

Among the house specialties on the dinner menu are pastas such as the Rigatoni Fra Diavolo (sausage sautéed with black olives, white onions in spicy creamy basil marinara sauce); Linguine with Clams in red or white sauce; Ravioli Siciliana (in a cream sauce with pancetta, green onions, and sweet baby peas); or the baked specialties such as beef cannelloni, lasagna or stuffed shells Florentine.

Other great standouts are the Fettuccine Pescato for seafood lovers (a combination of shrimp, clams, mussels and scallops with spices and seasonings tossed in a creamy marinara sauce); the wonderful Veal Marsala; the shrimp scampi; spicy chicken angel hair; or the eggplant parmigiana. Also available here are traditional and wood fired pizzas (we enjoyed the roast garlic chicken made with white onions, parsley and shallot butter). Also check the family dinner specials, served family style for parties of two or more. Enjoy lunch or dinner soon at Mangio Bene...wow! Call (619) 444-0303.



Patriarch Domenico Donato with granddaughter Tamberly and grandson Lenny.