

Gianno's Offers Delightful Italian Dining Experience

Tucked away in a strip mall at the corner of Holland and Dussell in Maumee, you'll find a restaurant with authentic Italian flair. Gianno's Italian Bistro occupies two storefront areas, both non-smoking. There is a small bar in the first room with a particularly good view of the kitchen. Yes, the kitchen is open for all to see, and that provides part of the enjoyment of dining at Gianno's. The staff wants you to feel that you are dining in someone's home, and treat you like family. The décor and white cloth tablecloths and napkins help make a visit to Gianno's a delightful experience.

Gianno's is not part of a chain. It is owned and operated by a local gentleman – Greg Ruffy. Greg, a Toledo native with 24 years' experience in the food service business, is also the executive chef. Because this is an independent restaurant, patrons can appreciate that the chefs make their own soups, sauces, marinades, dressings, croutons, pizza dough, desserts, and many other parts of the meal.

The menu is a little trip to Italy. All items are presented in Italian with plenty of English information so you will know just what to expect. And expect it all to be delicious. Antipasto offerings (\$6 - \$12) include bruschetta (toasted bread topped with fresh garlic, tomatoes, basil, and extra virgin oil) and calamari (squid), deep fried with a hint of a roasted pepper sauce. The primo appetizer, costoletta agnello (three grilled baby lamb chops), is tender and tasty.

Zuppa e insalata selections (\$3 - \$9) include baked garlic rolls. Minestrone is always available and, each week, a special soup is made fresh in Gianno's kitchen. A variety of salads is available; their made-from-scratch Caesar dressing has an appetizing tangy flavor. You can add chicken, portabella mushrooms, salmon, shrimp, or scallops to your salad for a modest increase in price.

Pasta entrées (\$10 - \$13) include a choice of the Caesar or house salad. By the way, their house salad is mixed field greens, not ordinary head lettuce, with gorgonzola cheese and homemade croutons. Spaghetti con marinara is also available with either meatballs or Italian sausage. Traditional Bolognese, ravioli, lasagna, and fettuccini Alfredo are also delightful dishes. One of my favorites is melanzane parmigiana, the most tender grilled eggplant, topped with marinara and parmesan cheese, and served on cappellini noodles. You can add chicken, portabella mushrooms, salmon, shrimp, or scallops to your pasta for a few dollars more.

Carne e pesce entrées (\$14 - \$19) include house or Caesar salad, roasted redskin potatoes, and crisp vegetables. Chicken and veal dishes are served parmigiana, marsala, rosemarino, and picatta style. Jumbo sea scallops and large shrimp in white wine and garlic butter, pistachio and pine nut crusted white fish, and halibut in Dijon horseradish crust are some of the favorites of Gianno's seafood selections. Three higher priced entrées (\$22 - \$29) are worth the trip to this Arrowhead area restaurant - twin beef filets with mushroom and red wine, rack of lamb, and a 14-ounce veal chop.

Veal chops are not easy to find in Toledo area restaurant, and Gianni's chop, which is topped with gorgonzola, is one of the best.

The wine and champagne collection (\$15 - \$65; and a few more costly) at Gianni's is extensive, with wines from Italy, France, California, and even a native Ohio wine, Luccio Riesling. More than half of their wine selections are available by the glass (\$4 - \$9).

I have never been disappointed with the dolci prepared by sous chef Jeff Licata. Tiramisu, cannoli, and pistachio cheesecake are always available. During my last visit, the apple torte special was perfect for autumn dining.

Gianni's serves panino imbottito (sandwiches) from 11:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. I must tell you about the pizza choices that available during the day and the evening. This is how Gianni's began, as a pizza restaurant. The ingredients may sound typical but, with Gianni's own dough and sauces, the combination of flavors is delectable.

Gianni's has weekly appetizer, entrée, and dessert specials, which can be found on their website, **GiannosItalianBistro.com**. The site lists their entire food and wine menu, and tells you more about the chefs. You may also want to complete their "contact us" form and receive a certificate to use on your visit to their restaurant.

Gianni's Italian Bistro, 310 West Dussel Drive at the corner of Holland, 419-893-8337. Monday – Thursday, 11:00 a.m. – 10:00 p.m.; Friday, 11:00 a.m. – 11:00 p.m., Saturday, 5:00 p.m. – 11:00 p.m. Parking is available in front of the restaurant. Reservations are always appreciated.

Review by D. Ellen Critchley
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