

New variations on beef and beer, pumpkin and pies transform local menus

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AJP Executive Editor

October, with its record breaking heat, is finally past. With a promise of cooler weather in Southern Arizona, local restaurateurs are beginning to think about dishes that make the most of fall's bounty.

At **Gusto Osteria** on Tucson's east side, where owner Gus Gerson rules the kitchen, the focus is on Italian classics, often with a modern twist. One example for fall: his hearty Osso Bucco, braised lamb shanks slowly roasted with a sauce of tomatoes, chicken stock and aromatic vegetables, served over pasta. There's also lighter fare at the Tanque Verde Road restaurant, such as fish specials, which start with the freshest offerings from Gerson's fish purveyor, usually sea bass, snapper or trout. Salmon, always available, is a perennial menu favorite, served with a lemon dill butter sauce.

Heading north to **El Cisne Cocina de Mexico** at Swan Road, co-owner Phil Ferrante offers a vegetarian spin on a

Mexican favorite: Fajitas de Portabello. El Cisne is also showcasing two new beef dishes, the classic Bistec Tampiqueño, a grilled steak served with a chile relleno — "a very pretty plate," says Ferrante — and Picadillos de Carne Molida, an exotic blend of ground beef with prunes, raisins, green apple, garlic and other seasonings.

At **Mama's Famous Pizza & Heroes**, with four locations, "we stay pretty solid with what we've always been serving," says Liz Biocca, special events coordinator. Aware that many people, especially millennials, are rediscovering the joy of cooking at home, she emphasizes that customers can purchase dough, sauce, and cheese to make their own pizzas. Mama's gluten-free dough is especially popular and they also offer take-and-bake pizzas — it's all about giving customers options, says Biocca. Mama's is closed for Thanksgiving, but the day before is one of the busiest in the pizza industry, so ordering ahead is encouraged, she says.

Bar manager Jon Herrera at **Tavolino Ristorante Italiano** on Skyline Drive is welcoming fall with new libations such

as the Cinnamon Whiskey Sour and the 20th Century, which combines gin, Cocchi Americano (a wine-based aperitif), crème de cacao and lemon. From the kitchen, Tavolino is offering "several outstanding beef dishes, all hand cut in-house featuring premium 1855 certified Angus beef," including Carpaccio and Tagliata, a grilled, sliced steak, says Chef Massimo Tenino. "Our ever-evolving specials," he adds, feature a variety of seasonal ingredients.

Gourmet Girls Gluten-Free Bakery/Bistro on Oracle Road is cooking up "everything pumpkin," from pie to chili, says co-owner Susan Fulton. They are also gearing up to provide "everything for Thanksgiving but the turkey," including stuffing cubes, pre-made stuffing, gravy, mashed potatoes, sweet potatoes and dinner rolls, as well as pies and pumpkin logs with cream cheese filling. Gourmet Girls' pecan and pumpkin pies are adapted from her mother's recipes, says Fulton, who notes that Thanksgiving orders must be placed in advance.

Further north on Oracle Road, at

Claire's Café and Art Gallery in Catalina, owner Claire Johnson seeks out organic local produce for dishes that include soups, salads and vegetable omelets. Open for breakfast and lunch, Claire's menu includes the classic LEO (lox, scrambled eggs and onions) and cheese blintzes with fruit toppings. They're also preparing pies for Thanksgiving — pumpkin, sweet potato, apple and cherry — which should be ordered several days in advance.

Pionic Pizza and Pasta, centrally located on Campbell Avenue, is taking advantage of Tucson's great breweries by adding its fifth local beer on tap, says co-owner Scott Sinclair. Also new are garlic cheese strips, a play on garlic bread from Pionic's 800-degree oven. New appetizers and desserts are coming soon, says Sinclair. He's not ready to spill the beans in print, but if you dine there, don't be surprised if you're invited to sample a new dish. And guests can always create their own unique pizza, pasta or salad from Pionic's choice of 40 fresh ingredients, he says.

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