



The Calamari Luciana is a great way to start a meal.

A Little Slice of Italy

Armando's Cucina Italiana & Pizzeria offers a taste of Italy in the heart of Winter Park.

By Kevin Fritz

If you love Italian food — and who doesn't — a lively atmosphere, and al fresco seating, Armando's Cucina Italiana & Pizzeria may be the closest thing Winter Park has to wining and dining palazzo style.

Now in its third year and located in Winter Park's Hannibal Square neighborhood, Armando's continues to draw crowds with its classic Italian fare. You'll come for the food, and you'll leave with plans to return for more.

Culinary palette pleasers dot the menu. From traditional Margherita pizza melding fresh mozzarella, plum tomato sauce and basil, to the lemon white wine butter sauce and capers forming a light, yet robust layer atop the Vitello (veal) Piccata served on a bed of spinach.

For starters, the Calamari Luciana (calamari sautéed in a wine sauce) will prepare your taste buds for the evening, as will the fine se-

lection of red and white regional wines. Appetizer specials are prepared nightly, such as the Mozzarella Burrata (buffalo mozzarella stuffed with buttermilk cheese and wrapped in prosciutto), which is superb. The Insalata di Spinaci with onions, bacon and tomatoes is one of the best in town.

The flavors of Armando's homemade pasta resonate from the dishes whether accompanied by beef, veal or seafood. The Spaghetti

alle Vongole is a wonderful mix of clams, olive oil, garlic and white wine sauce served over spaghetti. The traditional Pollo Marsala expertly marries fresh mushrooms in a rewarding Marsala wine reduction sauce. Mushrooms also take center stage in the Parpadelle ai Funghi Selvaggi, mixed with a butter blanc sauce and truffle oil. There is no doubt — Armando's freshly prepared mushrooms are exquisite.

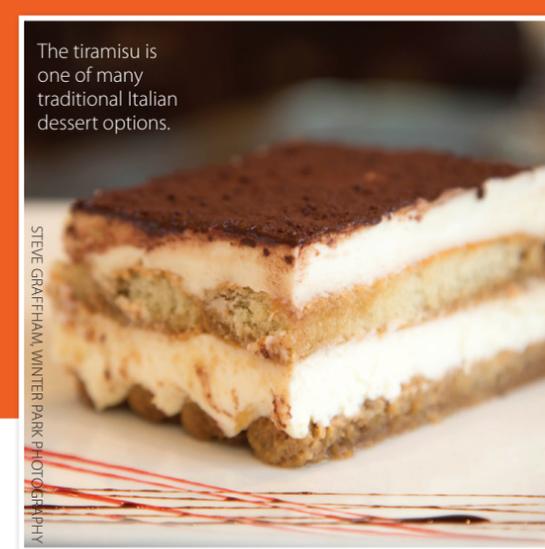
Specialty pizzas range from Carne (sausage, chicken, prosciutto, pancetta) to the Napoli, which is layered with shrimp, calamari and mussels. Calzones — baked or fried — are filled with prosciutto, fresh mozzarella and ricotta.

STEVE GRAFFHAM/WINTER PARK PHOTOGRAPHY



The Margherita pizza is topped with fresh mozzarella, plum tomato sauce and basil.

Armando's offers a dozen-plus wines by the glass, and for beer drinkers, traditional Peroni is a perfect choice.



The tiramisu is one of many traditional Italian dessert options.

stone street along the side of the restaurant. Live music is part of the fun on Thursday nights, weather permitting.

Armando's Cucina Italiana & Pizzeria is open from 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Monday through Thursday; 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. Friday and Saturday; and 11 a.m. to 9:30 p.m. on Sundays. **L**

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If you do leave room for dessert, the chef offers nightly specials. Indulge in the ricotta cheesecake, the Limoncello cake or Armando's quintessential tiramisu.

The staff is Italian-fare educated and offers service in true Italian style, so don't be in a hurry. If you want to stop in for a drink and perhaps a little antipasti, there is inside and outside seating at the two-sided bar. Armando's offers a dozen-plus wines by the glass, and for beer drinkers, traditional Peroni is a perfect choice.

Outdoor seating is open in a back courtyard or in the bar area along the sidewalk, but a favorite is dining at tables set on the cobble-