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Lunch with the Boss: Food made fresh at Indian Kitchen King

LUNCH WITH THE BOSS: Popular restaurant is located at 610 Main St.

By Michele DeLuca features@nightandday.com

Feb 28, 2019

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ROYAL TREAT Indian Kitchen King serves up 'Lunch with the Boss.' Page 2



Editor's Note: The following is an irregular series following the Niagara Gazette/Lockport Journal publisher John Celestino as he discovers restaurants in the Niagara region, accompanied by Michele DeLuca, lifestyles editor for both papers.

My boss, John Celestino, publisher of this newspaper, loves Indian food.

For those of us who share his appreciation for fluffy white rice, hot, puffy nan bread and butter chicken, that's a good thing. For others, like my colleague, Cheryl Phillips, director of operations for the Gazette and Union Sun, who joined us for lunch the other day, Indian food would not be her choice for lunch meetings but she's learned to enjoy certain dishes and she's a very good sport.

We met at Indian Kitchen King, across from the Main Street Post Office in Niagara Falls.

"The first time I came here, it felt like my grandmother's house," John told me when I sat down with him and Cheryl at a table in the tidy little spot, cheerfully bedecked in red tablecloths, red drapes and red upholstered chairs.

We ordered several things to share from the menu, including a couple of dishes John hadn't tried yet. Since it's owned by a grandmother with many years experience cooking at Indian restaurants in the region, I wondered why it was named "Indian Kitchen King" but I must say, we ate like kings that day.

The restaurant, which opened last year, is one of John's favorites. He eats there weekly and some days will just order the soup, chana dal, made from dried, split chick peas with a multitude of spices including garlic, chili, turmeric, coriander, cilantro and more.

It's comfort food on any day, but especially a cold winter's day, particularly for those who like those flavors. John said the soup is an "explosion of tastes" and when I tried mine for the first time, I agreed. I'll be back for the chana dal for sure, but I could never order it

without also ordering the freshly made garlic nan bread, decked with thin slices of garlic and dotted with parsley. The best part about Indian food is well-made nan, buttery and served warm like its served at India Kitchen King.

The owner and chef, Surinder Singh and her husband, Surjit Singh, who also works as a local cab driver, have owned a couple of restaurants in the region and she's worked as a cook in several others. But, she seems happy to run the kitchen single-handedly, cooking everything from scratch when it's ordered, and getting help when she needs it from her grandson, Arshdeep Singh, 15, a student at Niagara Falls High School and his grandmother's translator.

The day we were there, the dishes came out quickly. We ordered tandoori chicken, baked drumsticks with paprika and other spices on the skin which give it a beautiful red color. The drumsticks are served with slices of uncooked green pepper, onions and slices of lemon. Wonderful. With that we had dishes of perfect basmati rice, a spinach dish called saag and a chicken dish called vindaloo, with tender chicken and potatoes. We asked for medium spiciness in the dishes, which turned out to be the perfect amount of heat and flavor for all three of us.

Afterward, we did something none of us do often in an Indian restaurant, usually because we are always too full. We ordered two desserts to share.

The first was a dish of what looked like three doughnut holes, gulab jamun, made from a sort of pancake batter, served steaming hot and covered with what appeared to be a hot simple syrup flavored with rose water. Delicious. We also ordered ras malai, which was three small slices of sweet cheese which tasted like cheesecake, in a creamy pudding sauce. The desserts are small so they were just the right touch after such a wonderful meal.

We enjoyed everything we tried and with the assistance of Surinder's grandson, nicknamed Ashe, who often helps his grandmother with serving and preparation, we had an enjoyable conversation about the food and his family, who are from Northern India.

When I asked him what he might like potential customers to know about Indian Kitchen King, Ashe said, "I guess I would say, if you are looking for good Indian food, come here."

Cheryl, John and I would agree.

Indian Kitchen King is located at 610 Main St. and is open 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Monday through Thursday and 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Friday through Sunday. The prices are reasonable and in the summer, there is a small buffet all day. For more information, visit online at indiankitchenking.com.

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