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A Place Made Just To Order



CANDACE C. MUNDY/TAMPA TRIBUNE PHOTO

-Bob Hlavka, the head chef at Sunset Dining, 18450 US 41, Lutz, prepares a lunch sandwich French Dip and french fries.

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By B.C. MANION, The Tampa Tribune

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LUTZ - It would be easy to zoom past Sunset Dining, a restaurant that opened this month in a strip center just off U.S. 41.

The business is too far back from the road to call attention to itself.

Fortunately for Carl and Tina White, their casual fine-dining restaurant is close to two widely known community landmarks: a bustling McDonald's directly in front and the Old Lutz Schoolhouse just down the street.

So telling people how to get there is a snap, Carl White said.

Another plus is the restaurant is within walking distance for scores of people who work in the small offices tucked behind the restaurant and on the other side of Sunset Lane.

Even so, the Whites aren't sitting back waiting for crowds to appear.

As they geared up for the opening Dec. 4, they also spent months talking up the restaurant - to business groups, homeowners associations, car clubs and people who were curious enough to poke their head in the door to see when the restaurant would open.

Vicki Spence and Brian Vick, recently eating lunch at the restaurant, said they were eager to give it a try.

"We just live down the street," Spence said. "We've been waiting. There are very few good restaurants around here."

Each ordered a shrimp salad and soup for lunch. They enjoyed the salad, but were even more impressed by the soup.

"It was an unusual-sounding soup," Spence said. "It was garbanzo bean and pulled pork in a cream sauce. It was delightful."

"I had the chicken gumbo," Vick said. "It was very good."

The restaurant is open for lunch and dinner and is planning a Sunday brunch, once its party room is ready, which is expected in January. In the meantime, the

The restaurant also will take group bookings for breakfast on other days of the week.

Menu options for lunch and dinner are varied, with appetizers, soups, salads, sandwiches and entrees available for lunch, and a wider array of such choices, except sandwiches, at dinner. A children's menu is always available.

White envisions the restaurant as a place where people can meet for lunch or dinner, hold breakfast meetings, birthday parties, anniversary dinners and other special occasions.

The 6,000-square-foot restaurant has 106 seats. The party room will add 35 seats.

Features of the restaurant include wood furniture, an oak parquet bar and a sunset decor, and the dining room centerpiece is a pergola that is dressed up with decorations to suit special themes.

The table inside the pergola, arranged in a square, can accommodate up to 12 people. It's set up that way so people can chat easily, White said.

"We've tried to make it as comfortable as we could because we want people to feel as though they can linger here," White said.

He wants people to be so pleased by their experience that they pass the word on to others.

"When they leave here what's most important to us is that they be able to tell their friends, not only was the food wonderful, but it was a great value."

White said the success of the restaurant will hinge on attracting customers,