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COLLEGE PARK

For those who think outside the pizza box

LESSIE SCURRY

Jay Chikhaoui came to College Park with a purpose.

After nine years living in New York, the French-trained chef wanted to put his bistro experience to work in a business of his own.

"It was too expensive in the city, and this is an up-and-coming area," he said. "We're proud to be a part of this community."

Chikhaoui's relative, Ray, found a pizzeria located at 3823 Main St., and the two became affiliated with the franchise before buying it out and converting it into an Italian bistro.

The two remodeled the restaurant, installing hardwood floors, re-exposing the brick walls, and adding a bar and tables with white tablecloths.

They named it fina Italian Bistro.

"It's Old World, European style," said Chikhaoui, who took culinary studies in Oxford, England.

The menu is classic Italian.

"It's authentic across the board," said Chikhaoui, who also is the chef. "We use fresh vegetables and bake fresh breads."

The menu includes salads, appetizers, pasta, entrees, paninis, calzones, rolls, pizza and desserts.

Prices range from \$5.25 for appetizers to \$16.49 for a large pizza. Pastas and entrees range from \$8.55 to \$13.95.

Appetizer selections include bruschetta, fried calamari and pasta fagioli soup.

Among the pastas are chicken classic lasagna, fettucini alfredo and baked ziti. Entrees include shrimp scampi, veal toscano and steak pizzaioli (sauteed rib-eye).

Paninis (grilled chicken with tomatoes, onions and lettuce; eggplant with ricotta cheese, tomato sauce and herbs), calzones (spinach and mushrooms; meat lover's; and create your own); and rolls (veggie with broccoli, green peppers, tomatoes, onions, spinach, mushrooms and mozzarella cheese; eggplant with mushrooms, onions and mozzarella cheese) are served for lunch only.

The New York-style pizzas are 12- and 16-inch with the usual toppings, as well as chicken, artichokes, sun-dried tomatoes, spinach, broccoli, garlic, eggplant and jalapeno peppers.

Fina's offers a 50-item cocktail and wine list, with wines from such places as Italy, Spain and France.

"Being next to the airport with people coming here from different parts of the world, we have to offer wines from different parts of the world."

Diners often end their meals at fina with desserts such as cannoli, tiramisu, cheesecake or gelato.

"We wanted to bring something different to College Park," Chikhaoui said. "We wanted to bring authentic Italian food, and we've done that."

Hours are 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Mondays through Fridays, and 5 p.m. to 11 p.m. on Saturdays. The restaurant is closed on Sundays.

The phone number is 404-767-9292. The Web site is www.finatlanta.com.

Graphic

BISTRO AT A GLANCE

- Who: Jay Chikhaoui, co-owner
- Where: fina Italian Bistro, a restaurant
- Address: 3823 Main St., College Park
- How long open: Since July 2005
- Business goal: "We want people to think out of the box and get an authentic experience with good service and atmosphere and fresh ingredients."

-- Jay Chikhaoui