



DINING: Saffron's food, customer service is exemplary

Lou Harry April 13, 2009

There's good customer service—and then there's customer service that leads you to want to tell everyone you know about it. For an example of the latter, here's a tale from Saffron Café (621 Fort Wayne Ave., 917-0131), the new Moroccan eatery that's taken over the former shell of the Canary Café.

When we arrived, we were greeted by chef/owner Anas Sentissi, who asked our names and welcomed us individually. Nice. But that's not the story. During the very satisfying lunch, Sentissi emerged again, this time to answer our questions about the special flavor of the hummus (\$4.95)—apparently it comes in part from the multi-day soaking of the chickpeas. He also explained his kids' meals policy. You won't find hot dogs or chicken nuggets here. Instead, tykes get a full adult portion with the spices toned down, and pay half price. Cool. But that's not the story, either.

The story came when we found ourselves embarrassingly a tad cash short and without credit cards. Quick and easy solution: Leave my party as collateral and hit a nearby ATM. But when I asked my waiter where the nearest one was, he wasn't sure and asked waiter No. 2. Sentissi overheard the conversation and said, "No, no, no, no, no." (I believe that was the correct number.) "You are in Morocco. I'll take care of it." Not just a courtesy move—he had no idea I was reviewing—the man physically blocked me from leaving to score the extra \$5 needed to satisfy the bill-plus-tip. He then pulled out his own billfold to cover what was missing.

When a restaurant goes beyond the usual playbook to make you feel so at home, it would be awkward to have to report on disappointing food. I'm thankful I don't have to. The Chicken Kabob (\$9.95 but kid-priced down to \$4.95) was chunky and flavorful. Couscous Royale (\$9.95)—a bowl of spiced rice with seemingly decorative carrots, zucchini, tomatoes, green peppers, turnips, red potatoes and cabbage—both hearty and subtle, with plenty left over for a second meal.

Moroccan Honey Chicken Tajines (\$11.95) found a quarter chicken—you choose light or dark meat—accented by a saffron sauce and cinnamon, surrounded by succulently flavored pear, prunes and apricot. Delicious, but watch for the bones. Dessert brought Homemade Baklava (\$6), rich with pistachio and almonds and tinted with honey.

The food alone would have made me look forward to paying off my \$5 IOU to Saffron Cafe. The desire to show customers a good time is the reason I'm happily and confidently insisting others pay a visit.