

bill of fare

Paulie's Anna Rose in Ewing serves fine Italian and more

By **SUSAN SPRAGUE YESKE**
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

Paulie's Anna Rose is a family business, named for members of the family, with employees who may not be family, but feel as though they are.

A visit to the stately Victorian home that has served as a restaurant for decades almost seems like a visit to someone's home, until you spy the expansive bar that lines a wall in one of the restaurant's charming dining rooms.

It helps that the staff works hard to make people feel comfortable, catering to those from as near as the neighborhood and as far as Atlantic City who come to dine on continental and Italian dishes made from the recipes of owner Paulie Villareal and the homestyle desserts created by his wife, Colleen.

Villareal is a Ewing native who first made his mark with Pep's Cheesesteaks in Trenton's Chambersburg before spending several decades in Atlantic City. In 2002, he bought the former Lieggi's Ewing Manor Restaurant and came home, naming the restaurant for himself, his mother and his wife's mother. With him came his steak sandwiches, which are served at lunch at Paulie's, as well as many of his Atlantic City customers. They make the trek across the state for the food crafted by chef Angelo Demitri and the attention of the pleasant staff, including bar manager Vincent Landolfi.

The Villareals were on vacation during our recent visit, but Landolfi

Paulie's Anna Rose

234 West Upper Ferry Road, Ewing (609) 882-1150 (pauliesannarose.com)

Full bar. Reservations recommended on Saturdays and holidays.

HOURS: Lunch 11 a.m.-3 p.m. Tue.-Fri., dinner 5-10 p.m. Tue.-Sun.

CREDIT CARDS: All major

FOOD: Very good

SERVICE: Cheerful and efficient

AMBIANCE: The large white Victorian mansion is graceful and welcoming, set on a small hill where it looks down on the road. The main floor of the former home has a series of dining rooms that add a coziness to the white-tablecloth experience.

COST: Appetizers \$4.50-\$16.50; entrees. Lunch \$4.50-\$16.50

confirmed that Paulie's has a loyal staff — "It's extended family here," he says — and clientele. Some pre-date Paulie's and Lieggi's, he said.

"We've got a lot of older clientele who have come here for the past 50 years," he says.

The restaurant also draws a younger, internet-savvy crowd that has signed up for e-mails from the restaurant's website, which offers coupons and dinner specials.

It's that attention to the past and the present that keeps people coming back, along with the good food, all of which is made on the premises.

We started with beef barley soup, \$4.50. It was hearty and thick with barley, vegetables and bits of tender, flavorful beef.

A special appetizer of cold



MICHAEL MANCUSO/THE TIMES

Paulie's Anna Rose restaurant is located on West Upper Ferry Road in Ewing.

smoked trout, \$14.50, could have done duty as a delightful lunch. The trout, which was smoked at the restaurant, was mild and firm, with just a hint of smokiness. It contrasted nicely with the accompanying scoop of freshly made horseradish cream. An assortment of green and black olives, fresh greens and roasted red peppers finished the plate.

A side order of Caesar salad, \$4.50, was less impressive. The lettuce was dull and the dressing uninspired.

But all else was forgotten when an order of two fat crab cakes arrived, \$28.50. Although not listed on the menu, our server said they were a house specialty and it was obvious why. Large lumps of top-quality fresh crab had just enough binder to hold them together, and a hint of seasoning to enhance the flavor without overwhelming it.

An order of chicken Pauli, \$18.50, consisted of two generous slices of white meat chicken breast served with a combination of sautéed shallots, mushrooms, roasted red peppers and green peas covered with a light champagne cream sauce.

The chicken was cooked to a perfect turn and the lightness of the wine-based cream sauce was a pleasant change from heavier Alfredo sauces.

The vegetables of the day that accompanied the entrees were homemade mashed potatoes, thick and creamy, and a vegetable medley. No visit to Paulie's could be complete without trying his tomato sauce, so we opted for a dish of penne with sauce as a side dish. The noodles were cooked to a perfect bite and the sauce was outstanding. A spoonful of freshly grated cheese was icing on the cake, so to speak.

While Colleen Villareal was away, the staff followed her recipes to create the restaurant's popular line of desserts. Although assured her banana cream pie is "to die for," we chose to try a chocolate layer cake with ricotta frosting and a slice of peach-blueberry-sour cream pie, \$6.50 each.

Both were rich, flavorful and large enough to share. The chocolate cake was moist with a tender crumb, while the pie was reminiscent of summer days when blueberries and peaches are in season.

Paulie's Anna Rose is a charming restaurant, with pleasant staff determined to serve the customers as best as it can. The food is crafted with thought and care, and the generous portions are served in a timely fashion. All of these make it easy to understand why customers would come from as far as Atlantic City for a meal.