

'Town' is in your neighborhood

Does your mind go blank when you want to try a new restaurant? Do you usually fall back on the "old regulars" or the ones within a five-minute car ride of your home?

We live in a growing suburbia and the dining choices are expanding. But, somehow we are still drawn to the comfortable places, the casual, easy ones; restaurants with good food, parking and friendly service. One of these places, appropriately enough, is called Town Kitchen & Bar, at 7301 SW 57th Ct., in South Miami.

Only seven months on the restaurant scene, Town has become a home away from home for many families and singles, people young and old. Large, but cozy, with plenty of seating inside and out, Town's décor is subdued, with a somewhat trendy, happening feel. The walls are adorned with photographs of varying sizes of people you may know - Pincrest cardiologist Ted Feldman riding an old bike, the Mermell family in a "jumping" shot, Gulliver Schools originator Marian Krutulis in her famous enthusiastic hand-clapping pose; and Dr. Jon Fialkow with daughter Alex dressed up like devils for Halloween.

You will recognize more people inside the restaurant, described by co-owners Jon Janette and Brandon Lurie as a "neighborhood joint," a gathering place that's all about community.

Lurie is truly invested in the concept of neighborhood; most of his real estate projects have been close to his South Miami home - Parkside Village, Pincrest Reserve, Plaza 62, a medical-office condo across from South Miami Hospital, a hotel-condo project in upstate Melbourne; and his latest, Pine Manor, a 42-unit townhouse community in High Pines. Sorry, guys; all sold out.

The 30 plus silent investors in Town are either residents of neighboring communities and/or South Miami business owners.

"Chain stores and restaurants kept asking us if they could have space in the

Inside Pincrest WITH ROBIN KASKEL POLSKY



Pictured (l-r) are Jacqueline Halpern, Dana Rozansky, Randy and Robyn Fisher, Tracy Moret, David Moret, Town manager Marjie Hicks, BJ Harnick, Dr. Jolie Kaufman Janette and Stella Lurie, Town co-owner Jon Janette and Steven Harnick.

Plaza 57 building where Town is located," Lurie said. "We turned them away. We want to keep it all about community."

Now there's Jenna White, Pili Carrera, Marble Slab, Foot Solution, HSBC bank and Haveli furniture to top off your meal!

Lurie said they built extra wide sidewalks at Town so people could bike on over, bring their favorite poochie for a meal (they'll provide water bowls and bones) or just relax and hang out. Driving to Town? Take advantage of the valet parking and somewhat hidden garage next to the restaurant, across from Bellezza. Grab a bite before the movies and keep your car there until you're done. If you've tried to park in South Miami lately, this is a huge plus.

People come to Town because it's comfortable, convenient and friendly; and, of course, to eat and drink, like Pincrest Elementary kindergarten teacher Becky Biegan, who comes with

girlfriends after work.

"The restaurant and bar has a great atmosphere," Biegan said. "Arthur, the bartender, is so friendly and makes a mean Raspberry Lychee martini! All my girlfriends love the specialty drinks and the extensive wine list."

Lurie says they have been pleasantly surprised by the brisk liquor sales. He adds that Town has an extensive beer, champagne and wine list with a "Top 25" - bottles of wine for \$25 and under. Town also offers wines by the three-ounce and six-ounce pour. The specialty? Head bartender Don Enfield talks up the Blackberry Lemon Drop made with Belvedere Citrus Vodka, sour lemon and fresh blackberries.

"It turns purple when you shake it up," Enfield said.

I must have looked overly enthusiastic. Next thing I know, Don hands me a sample. Drinking at Noon? It tasted darn good! Yum! Word has it that the Laid Back Lemonade and Towninis are excellent, too!

Of course, let's not forget to eat! Town's menu offers enticing choices of entrée salads, mussels, hot sandwiches, homemade soups, fresh-baked breads and brick-oven pizzas, a specially "rubbed" 10-ounce New York Strip with Steak Frites. Roast chicken. Mac and Cheese. All the comfort foods await you.

The most popular menu item? According to Chef Michael Altman, it's the "three-quarter pound Town Burger made with 100-percent certified Angus beef, with your choice of cheeses, mushrooms, onions, bacon or roasted peppers."

Pine Bay Estates resident Michael Meister, his wife, Susan, and children,

Meredith and David, enjoy Town because it's "casual, easy and convenient, with lots of food choices."

"Meredith loves the salads and frequents Town with friends," Susan said. "The other day we watched the Super Bowl during a party on Town's huge TV. David devoured the pizzas and burgers. The wings were especially good."

Tracy Mourning uses the private back room for her Honey Shine organization meetings. It holds up to 45 guests and is equipped with a huge flat-panel, high-tech TV system, fully A/V ready and perfect for meetings and parties.

Stella Lurie, wife of Brandon and mother of Amanda and Lauren, adds her sense of style, food know-how and marketing experience to Town.

When coming up with new ideas, she always thinks community.

"How can we keep the community involved?" she asked. "We offered romance-infused dinner specials on Valentine's Day and we are participating in the South Beach Food and Wine Festival. More special events are in the works, including a wine-dinner series featuring Barossa Valley wine from Australia, informal modeling by the retail stores in South Miami, a celebrity bartender night, an after-the-run night for Footwork's jogging club, and lots more is planned."

On any given day, you might see Pat Riley, Tracy and Alonzo Mourning, Lisa and Rick Mattaway, Julio Trias from Trias Flowers, Hunter Reno, John Secada with his wife and kids.

"People feel comfortable here," said manager Margie Hicks. "Famous or not, they feel they can come here and just be. Whether it's a \$10 pizza or a \$100 bottle of wine, Town is not pretentious."

Frequent customer Bob Hammel, a self-proclaimed world traveler, agrees. Hammel comes in almost daily for a two-hour lunch.

"I love to have some wine, talk and kibitz with the staff," Hammel said. "The service is unbelievable. It's like family here."

Hammel's favorite meal? The smoked salmon sandwich with cucumbers and cream cheese.

While sipping his wine, Hammel said that all his friends enjoy Town.

"I've never been disappointed," he said. "It's like family here."

Town Kitchen & Bar is open Monday through Thursday from 11:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. and from 5:30 p.m. to 2 a.m. on Friday and Saturday. Brunch is served on Sunday from 11:30 a.m. and take-out is available. For more information, call 305-740-8118.

Ideas for Inside Pincrest? Please contact me at 305-776-0468 or email me at <rkpcom@aol.com>. Thanks!