

Schera's Restaurant and Bar in Elkader for people seeking something different

By Sharon Wittman

It's important and interesting for people to try new cuisines and different things. People are seeking that out more and more. Schera's Restaurant and Bar in Elkader with its exotic foods and many interesting rooms and tented patio is someplace different. Owners Brian Bruening and Frederique Boudouani feature Algerian food along with local favorites.

Frederique began, "For the past six years we traditionally went to New Hampton to visit Brian's parents. In researching I found that not only is Iowa the home of the first mosque in the United States but it has a town named after a Moslem leader, Abdel Kader. It was kind of a revelation to me because I am of French-Algerian descent, my dad being Algerian. And so we came here and

made friends and kept coming and making friends and that is what kind of stirred our interest in Elkader."

Frederique said, "We are both from different backgrounds, Brian is a creative writer and I have a degree in computer engineering. We are not your typical restaurateurs; but I went back to Massachusetts and took a non-paid internship in a steakhouse for a summer just to get the feel of it, and the business side of it, as well as the commercial kitchen. We always enjoyed entertaining when we were in Boston. Our parties were all the rage. And we also did some catering. We took this place over after Thanksgiving last year."

Often Schera's will have two Algerian specialties on the weekday dinner menu. Brian said, "We have the chicken with apricots, which is more of a North

African safari dish, and Couscous with Algerian vegetable stew, which is a very quintessential North African Algerian dish."

Frederique explained what this dish is, "Couscous is the pasta of Africa. You could compare it to rice if you will, but it is basically wheat flour that is rolled. When it gets steamed it blossoms and becomes very tender. You put vegetables on top or a different kind of sauce. We give options to people to get either beef skewers, or vegetable skewers, or

(Continued on page 2)

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Schera's Restaurant

(Continued from page 1)

sometimes even shrimp skewers. It's very popular; a lot of people come seeking it."

Brian said, "We have the 12 oz. ribeye with mushrooms and red wine reduction, with entrees. You get a side salad and we have baskets of freshly baked bread each day. It's an Italian artisan bread that called Ciabatta bread."

Frederique detailed, "We have Algerian inspired appetizers that have been very popular as well. Cade is a really interesting French custard-like food. I get a lot of compliments about that. Also for appetizers we have the Samosas and the Bourek. They are basically a fillo dough which is a very thin pastry dough. You roll it in layers. What is interesting about it is that once it is fried or baked it becomes crunchy and very fragile. It is just holding itself together and then you bite into it and it crumbles. It is very tasty."

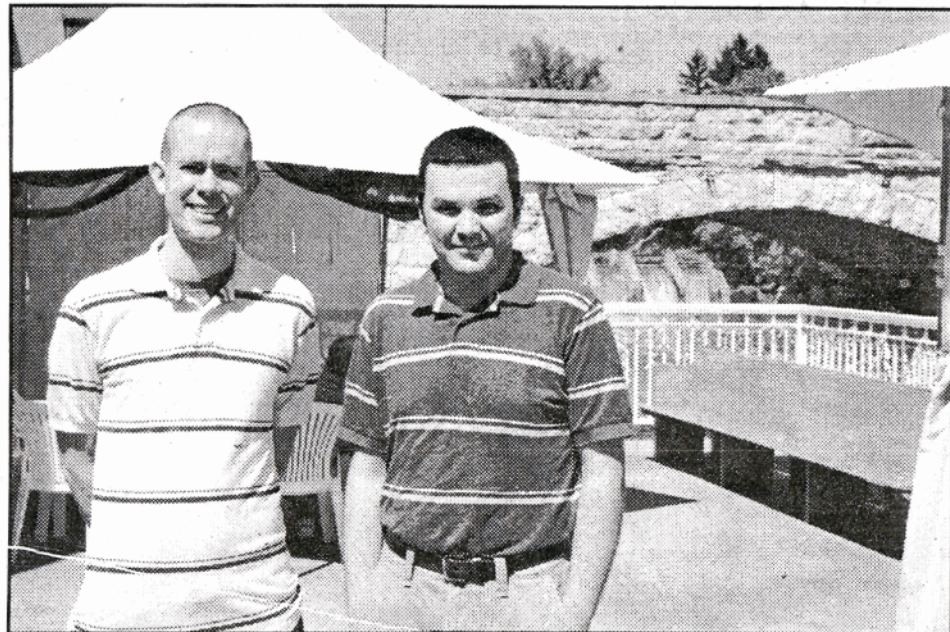
When asked what the house drink is Brian answered, "One of our house drinks that we developed is our pomegranate martini, which is a mixture of Absolute Vodka and pomegranate juice with a little simple stir to sweeten it up. And it's really good! It's not nearly as strong as a martini. Also we serve Blue Moon beer, which is by far our most popular beer. For the blue moon on June 30 we had a blue moon celebration here with live music on the patio."

Private rooms are available. They would do the catering for any party. Brian said, "The reason I think it works so well for large groups is that you have the bar side here and then we can set up dining in the other room. And so people can move almost seamlessly to dinner."

Brian commented, "We are trying to make this a place where people can come and spend an hour or two, have a few

good drinks, have a good meal, and enjoy themselves. Make dining an experience again. I think that is a very important part of good dining that has been lost somehow."

Frederique concluded, "I think our goal is to make a change in our little way. Try to introduce people to Algerian restaurants which are popping up in New York City. It's the rage right now because it's the new cuisine and very different from anything else in the region. We want, in our small way, to have the people of the region try something unique that somehow connects them to the rest of the world."



Brian Bruening and Frederique Boudouani stand on their restaurant's patio under the Keystone Bridge. (Press photo by Sharon Wittman)

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A busy night at Schera's Restaurant and Bar in Elkader. (Photo submitted)