

Stearns and Hill's success paves way for other ventures

By LIZ JENNINGS

MELROSE — Are you in search of fabulous food, phenomenal drinks and a cozy, comfortable yet vibrant atmosphere? Well look no further than Stearns and Hill's Bistro at 505 Main St.

Located in the heart of Melrose center the Bistro offers an extensive array of contemporary American cuisine. The dinner menu varies from Prince Edward Island Mussels, to New England Clam Chowder, a mixed greens and goat cheese salad, gourmet pizzas, Sirloin Tips, Filet Mignon, Veal, Lamb, Salmon Napoleon, fresh shrimp, scallops, and scrod (served, blackened, grilled, broiled and fried); Chicken Piccata, Chicken Broccoli and Ziti, Shrimp Scampi, Baby Back Ribs, Pork Chops and daily specials, to name a few.

The lunch menu consists of a delicious variety of sandwiches and salads, and many of the dinner items are offered at half the price and half the portion.

Not only do the savory dishes melt in your mouth but the presentation is really something special. All entrees are served with a garden salad and crisp French bread drizzled in a delicious garlic and butter sauce. Sharply dressed servers provide excellent service and are knowledgeable of both food and drink.

Complete with a full bar, Stearns and Hill's offers a wide-range of well-known, top shelf martinis. What sets these martinis apart from the rest is the unique process the bartenders use to mix them, topping each one with a delicate layer of shaved ice.

In addition to imported beers and a broad selection of spirits, the bistro's impressive wine list offers 30 different kinds of domestic and imported wines.

As for the atmosphere, Stearns and Hill's is about making its customers feel comfortable and relaxed. Soft tones are accented by warm candlelight, and customers will find that the experience can be both casual or more formal.

A short walk from many Melrose homes, families and colleagues alike will find the bartenders witty and energetic, and a friendly and helpful staff overall.

Owners Michael Palmer (chef) and his wife Amy Palmer opened



STEARNS AND HILL'S BISTRO, located at 505 Main St., has been providing quality drinks, service and food since its establishment in 1999.
(Liz Jennings Photo)

Stearns and Hill's Bistro in July 1999. Michael says his interest in the restaurant business began at 14 when he got his first job working at Brigham's. His intense work ethic and entrepreneurial core developed after he observed how hard his older brother Robert Palmer worked as an athlete.

Michael graduated from St. Anslem's College in New Hampshire with a BA in Restaurant Management, and later attended the California Culinary Academy in San Francisco. His first job out of college was running his father's restaurant. However he quickly learned that in order to make his own vision a reality he would need to venture out on his own.

Michael can be described as friendly, charismatic and hardworking; this is reflected in the quality of his product, his rapport with customers and also his loyal staff, many of whom have been with him since the very beginning.

He calls himself a "workaholic," saying that he is always looking to take on a new project, and he has. Shortly after Stearns and Hill's opened Michael opened The Swanton Street Diner on 72 Swanton St. in Winchester and Neno's Market, which later became Pastazza and was in operation until it was recently sold.

He calls his vision a "blanket

vision," explaining that he aims to keep alive his entrepreneurial spirit and welcomes any opportunity he feels passionate for.

Michael's latest project? The Tanner Tavern at 428 Main St. in downtown Woburn, which opened in November.

The Tavern (781-935-0777) is larger than any of Palmer's current establishments, and offers many of his traditional dishes with additional menu items and a raw seafood bar. On Sunday's all you can eat brunch is served from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

There are two sides to the restaurant, one room is a pub complete with a dining area, plasma TVs and a full bar. The other, a dining room with its own bar, a more low-key atmosphere which includes a piano. The Tanner Tavern offers live entertainment almost every night varying from a rock band, karaoke and a piano player to a jazz band.

"From the beginning to this day I have been super lucky," Palmer said. "We have been successful and I wake up every day and I love it. The success of the restaurant goes way beyond me. It includes my wife and family and all of my committed staff," he stated.

Michael concluded our interview by saying that restaurant goers can expect Stearns and Hill's Bistro to see a much anticipated renovation coming soon. Stearns and Hill's is open Monday through Thursday from noon to 10 p.m. and Fridays and Saturdays from noon to 11 p.m. (The Light Fare menu is available after 10 p.m.) and Sundays from 5 to 9 p.m. They also offer catering and can accommodate functions.

For more information visit www.karendrummey.com/stearnsandhill/index.htm or call 781-662-9111.