

# The Star-Ledger

Friday, March 16, 2012

## LA DOLCE 'VITA'



*A Bufalina pizza, left, and the Wiseguy pizza flank the Ragu pasta, penne with wild mushroom ragu, prosciutto and truffle oil.*

*The Stefano Ferrara oven at Pizza Vita.*

**A**dele DiBiase loves her pizza oven. “She’s beautiful,” says the chef and co-owner of Pizza Vita in Summit.

This is no ordinary oven, but a wood-fired Stefano Ferrara oven imported from Italy. With its round shape and gorgeous tile work, it’s almost a work of art, but it’s got a job to do — cook Neapolitan-style pizzas in a minute and a half. You can do this when the oven’s set at 900 degrees.

DiBiase started in the food business as a pastry chef, then she and her husband, Rocco Flores, opened Mama Tucci in Madison, which moved to Livingston before closing four years ago. Then the two opened, with Ernesto Santorelli and chef Marc Bruzzio, Bona Vita Osteria in Summit. Pizza Vita, housed in the space once occupied by Honey Browns, opened last July. It’s right next to the classic Summit Diner.

The menu emphasizes pizza and pasta; there are no veal, pork chop, chicken or fish fishes here, as at Bona Vita. The mood is cheerily informal, with brick walls, orange tables, orange curtains and a painting of the black-masked Pulcinella, a character from the 17th century Italian Commedia dell’Arte, who is recognized as the symbol of Naples.

The caprese appetizer (\$8) featured the ultra-creamy cheese made from mozzarella and cream known as burrata, paired with tomatoes, wood-fire peppers and olives. Excellent.

All three pizzas we sampled were commendable, if a touch undercooked. The Margherita (\$13), with crushed tomato, fior di latte (mozzarella made from cows) and basil, is a simple, straightforward pizza. The Funghi (\$14) is white pizza with a mushroom ragu and bufala mozzarella (made from water buffalo). The Tartufi (\$14) is

loaded with toppings — sausage, mushrooms, fior di latte and truffle oil.

The toppings and cheese all tasted top-notch; Pizza Vita uses imported Italian olive oil, flour, mozzarella, parmesan, tomatoes, balsamic vinegar and sea salt. The good stuff.

Good pizza, but the pastas turned out better. The Casa Nonna (\$14), with cavatelli, crushed tomato sauce and ricotta would make grandma happy. Everyone does cheese ravioli; Pizza Vita offers Sunday Ravi (\$16), pork-and-beef-stuffed ravioli topped with a plum tomato sauce. My favorite pasta: the Polpette (\$15), spaghetti with meltingly soft meatballs.

With DiBiase’s pastry background, dessert is a must. I cringe whenever I see the words “world famous,” on a menu or storefront, but the “world famous coconut cream pie” (\$8) is light and luscious. Call the chocolate-filled doughnuts (\$8) mini-zeppoles, only immeasurably better. DiBiase makes her own gelato (\$6); the espresso gelato is a treat.

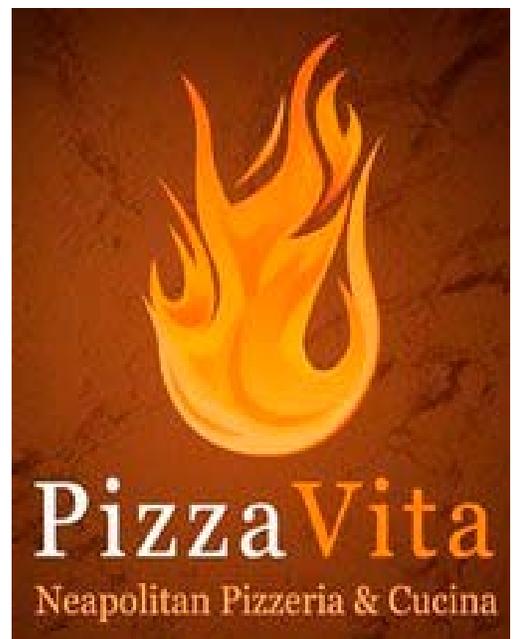
Other dishes include artichoke fritto (fried artichoke with lemon aioli, \$7) and Forno (penne baked with crushed tomato sauce and mozza-

rella, \$14). The salads include the Piadina (\$8), with arugula, prosciutto and pecorino.

DiBiase starts brunch this weekend (can you say lemon ricotta pancakes and egg white fritata?), and a pizza truck will hit the road in several weeks, visiting festivals, farmers’ markets and the like.

“It’s Pizza Vita on wheels,” DiBiase said, laughing.

*By Peter Genovese*



**7 Union Place, Summit**

**(908) 277-1400**

**[pizzavitanj.com](http://pizzavitanj.com)**

**Hours:**

**Lunch**

**11:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. Tuesdays through Fridays,  
noon to 3 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays.**

**Dinner**

**5 to 10 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays;  
5 to 9 p.m. Sundays.**

**Closed Mondays. BYOB.**