



TRUE TRATTORIA: “We are a true Italian trattoria, with delicious, high quality, unpretentious food and a warm and welcoming atmosphere.” The team at Camillo’s Café includes, from left: Raul Lopez, Dorothy Goodman, chef/owner Camillo Tortola, and pastry chef Karen Angelica Zorn.

## **It’s New to Us by Jean Stratton**

### **Camillo’s Café in Shopping Center Expands Space for Private Parties**

What better way to relax and unwind than to enjoy the party at Camillo’s Café! Now, even more people can join the party. Camillo’s has just expanded to accommodate 70 guests for private parties. The space adjacent to the popular Princeton Shopping Center café became available, and executive chef and owner Camillo Tortola did not hesitate.

“We wanted to have a private room for people for holiday parties, rehearsal dinners, corporate events, showers, children’s parties, etc.,” explains Mr. Tortola. “This will be a terrific setting for all kinds of events, with no added room charge for its use. We already have plans for New Year’s Eve, including a special menu. It will be a great night.”

Three special prix fixe menus will always be available for the private room, at \$30, \$45, and \$55 per head, he adds. The \$30 dinner includes salad, appetizer, pasta, choice of three entrees, dessert, and coffee; \$45 includes all of the above and also hot and cold antipasti; \$55 will offer a variety of additional specialties, such as oysters and cold seafood.

Camillo's does not have a liquor license, but it now distributes wine from the Hopewell Valley Vineyards, with a full wine list, including red and white port.

### Private Room

"We are really looking forward to enabling people to entertain in our special new private room," says Chef Camillo.

Helping people to enjoy themselves while dining out has been his mission since he opened the café three years ago, and before that when he owned two Italian restaurants in Scotland. As a chef, he has been devoted to creating delicious authentic Italian dishes. It is what he has been doing his adult life, and what fascinated him when he was a boy.

Born in Italy, and brought up by his grandmother in the small village of Miranda, Camillo was intrigued by his grandmother's cooking. "My grandmother was very poor after World War II. She had a simplicity and purity in the food that she prepared that shaped my palate. She'd put a chicken in a pot, with all fresh vegetables, and the flavor was wonderful. I fell in love with her cooking style, from Naples," he recalls.

"I remember tasting the freshest, purest ingredients, combined with the right colorful presentation. And the taste and aroma were very appealing. She fed me very well! I'd watch her, and that's when I decided to become a chef.

He trained for two years at the Roccaraso Cooking School in Italy, and worked in a variety of Italian restaurants as a chef before moving to Scotland, where he worked with well-known Italian chef, Enzo Ripa.

Now, Camillo believes that Princeton is the perfect setting for his trattoria. Prior to opening his café, he had sampled the Princeton restaurant scene, including working as an independent chef. "I always hoped to have a restaurant here. I thought the people in Princeton would appreciate an authentic Italian trattoria with high quality, yet unpretentious food. Personally, I love 'peasant' food, such as Caponanta di Melanzane (eggplant) with pesto and bruschetta. I love the simplicity of it. The simplicity of Italian food is what makes it so popular. A Mediterranean diet is the best in the world. Olive oil and tomato sauce are good for you."

### Best Quality

Everything at Camillo's is prepared to order, he adds, and everything is fresh. "I find the best quality ingredients. We specialize in a product cooked simply and cooked well. We have just changed our menu for winter, and we'll be adding cannoli (pasta stuffed with shrimp and scallops) with a bechamella sauce lightly spiced.

"Polenta with sausage ragu, truffles, pecorini cheese, and truffle oil is another dish, and we will also frequently offer burrata, a special mozzarella cheese made in Bari, Italy. It is only made in that region of Italy. Porcini mushrooms are another specialty, as is orata

(Mediterranean striped bass). It is served whole and shown to the customer, then we filet it and prepare it with extra virgin olive oil and lemon. It's a big favorite. That is not something you find in other restaurants in Princeton. We generally offer a lot of fish on the menu, and we can also accommodate people's special dietary needs."

Customers rarely skip dessert, he adds. A new pastry chef, Karen Angelica Zorn, has joined the staff at Camillo's, and one of her specialties is lavender chocolate mousse. Diners also like her pumpkin mousse and the special apple pie, marinated in apple liqueur.

The always popular tira misu is a 100-year-old recipe from Camillo's grandmother. This and other seasonal desserts can be topped off with cappuccino and espresso, and the relaxed atmosphere adds to a congenial dining experience.

### Own Personality

Also, in the warmer weather, Camillo's offer al fresco dining with tables outside.

Chef Tortola is very happy with the success of his restaurant and its location in the shopping center. "It's great here, easy parking, and also now the construction is finished, and everything looks so nice. The way I feel about my restaurant is that I treat people as if they were coming to my house. A restaurant is like a baby. As a baby grows, it forms a personality. A restaurant has its own personality, a special ambiance and atmosphere.

"We have lots of regular customers," he continues, "and the smile on a client's face after having tasted things they wouldn't get anywhere else in Princeton is a big pleasure for me. They often come back to the kitchen, thank me, and shake my hand. That is a great experience."

Now, he is happy that he can accommodate even more customers in the new private room, noting that "In addition to all the parties, we will be having wine tastings in the new room, including with CoolVines, the new Princeton wine shop, and with the Hopewell Valley Vineyards. Come and see our new private room for yourself, and enjoy a wine tasting or your next party with us!"

Camillo suggests calling as early as possible to book the room for the upcoming holidays. Reservations are also advised for general dining, both lunch and dinner. Take-out is also available.

Hours are Monday through Thursday 11:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. (lunch), 5 to 9 (dinner); Friday and Saturday until 10 p.m., and Sunday 5 to 9 (dinner only). (609) 252-0608.