



Michael's Southshore Restaurant

By Reid Duffy

After nearly 25 years toiling in the food and hospitality industry, in such lofty and demanding positions as chef, food and beverage manager and general manager for the JW Marriott, Sheraton, and Weston Hotel operations, and presiding over the muscular menus of the Shula's beefhouse bastions, Mike Moros decided to open his own establishment in the Geist area in 2010.

Since the restaurant industry is traditionally among the first to be sucker punched and left gasping by raucous recessions and weepy economies, with their clientele perceived hunkering down in their darkened kitchens and dens, subsisting on ramen noodles and popsicles until given the all clear to forage in the marketplace, it would appear the September 27, 2010 opening of Michael's Southshore would not be considered an exercise in exquisite timing.

But Moros, operating on the well-honed hunch that the economy was on its no-place-to-go-but upswing and the restaurateur's time-honored creed that "people gotta eat", felt comfortable unveiling Michael's Southshore in the fall off the southwest corner of Fox and Oaklandon Roads, showcasing a creative, contemporary, seasonally tweaked menu at prices that qualify as reasonable, in a sleek, comfortable



Friends Carenza Love (left) and Karen Meeks (right) catch up in the bar at Michael's Southshore as George England refills their drinks.

setting that welcomes families.

Some visitors might find the "Southshore" moniker a stretch, given that Michael's Southshore anchors the east end of the sprawling Geist Center shopping strip, with no beachfront property or lapping waves in sight. However, Geist Reservoir is in hailing distance, and with the bulk of Michael's clientele in the early going also hailing from there, Moros duly markets his establishment as their lake area dining and imbibing hangout, with large arty photographs of lake and marina scenes adorning the walls.

The premises consist of two dining rooms and roomy lounge with a large horseshoe shaped bar accommodating an extensive and impressive wine and craft beer list, with overall seating for 180, with the mix of tables and booths and exposed ductwork décor

garbed in black, with large, red circular bulkhead fixture providing the lighting, giving the overall look a contemporary sleekness. There is also a glassed indoor patio with fireplace and an outdoor patio for alfresco dining currently awaiting the spring thaw. Flat screen TVs at the corners of the premises help lock in the casual, relaxing vibes Moros is seeking, tuned to sports channels that serve to diminish or elevate whatever joy or angst our local teams and heroes are dispensing at the moment.

Moros, a 1986 graduate of Johnson and Wales University culinary arts program, and his chef, Ronnie Houston, a product of a Cordon Bleu culinary education, have designed a menu of a casual and trendy upscale dinner fare, ranging from soup, salads, and sandwiches to well-conceived grilled

meat, seafood, and pasta entrees, keeping the tariffs between \$14 and \$23. The \$8-\$10 sandwich board includes the all-but-legally-mandated breaded or grilled pork tenderloin, the trendy three-cheese, grilled panini accessorized with applewood bacon and tomato, the Cuban-style roast pork and ham panini, home roasted turkey BLTs, curried apple chicken salad on Indian naan bread, and an array of prime rib charbroiled burgers. A small ensemble of gourmet pizzas are also offered.

The appetizer offerings reflect Chef Houston's creative inspirations, most notable Asian BBQ chicken nachos featuring light, crispy wontons tastily adorned with shredded chicken, scallions, and spicy queso fresco cheese. Mussels steamed in chardonnay and pan fried mozzarella are promising dining launch pads, but a major highlight for me are the pork sliders (\$8), a trio of mini-pork burgers topped with a zesty chili relish as concocted decades ago by Moros's late father, Stan "Stash" Moros, who knew what Hungarian peppers and tomatoes were designed to do.

The three ground pork patties, topped with melted fontina cheese, were suitably plump for the "sliders" to easily decimate hunger pains as a main entrée. (I find myself oddly gratified, based on my adolescent dining traditions, to see the profound and meaningful influence and contribution



Executive Chef Ronny Houston displays one of his most popular creations, Asian BBQ chicken nachos.

White Castle has had on trendy appetizer menus.) Another worthy starter, especially as the weather turns Antarctic, is the smoked chicken corn chowder (\$5), offering a hearty, creamy, and the advertised smoky-flavored broth, well-stocked in chicken chunks and corn, augmented with flecks of onion, tomato, potato, and green pepper.

The main entrees showcases grilled skirt steak, four-hour slow roasted lamb shank, braised short ribs, tilapia baked and served on cedar plank, grilled salmon, seared scallops, and a "Brickyard" roast chicken arrangement in which the bird is marinated in olive oil, garlic, and lemon-flavored Fresca for 36 hours. And upon the direct request of dining traditionalists among the regulars, an eight-ounce filet mignon is also offered. I cast my lot with the braised country-style pork ribs (\$17), which I have always found to be an unsung delight of the pork rib cuts, much meatier, more tender, and every bit as flavorful as their spare and baby back brethren, with each rib taking on the essence of the pork chop.

All of those attributes were in place with Michael's country ribs, which also turned out to remarkably and surprisingly lean, which speaks to why some rib enthusiasts are not inclined to embrace the country style: a generous allotment of fat. However, the braising process effectively jettisons the fat, while maintaining the alluring flavor influence fat reliably provides, and fully providing here. Adding to the braised goodness was a ketchup-based barbecue sauce, created by Moros's mother, Karen, in her small catering business in Detroit, a sweet, not smoky sauce, effectively infiltrated with brown sugar, garlic, vinegar, and dried mustard, and working wonderfully with the tender pork.

Perhaps to the surprise of the proprietors, emerging as the star

MICHAEL'S SOUTHSHORE

11705 Fox Road
Indianapolis, IN 46236
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www.michaelsouthshore.com

Hours: Dinner, Monday - Friday,
4 p.m. - closing

Saturday - Sunday,
11:30 a.m. - closing

Entrée price range: \$8-\$23

Duffy's Rating: ★★★★★

attraction of the menu in the first two months is the Butternut Squash Ravioli (\$15). The large home-made ravioli rectangles are filled with a seamless blend of the mashed butternut squash, ricotta and cream cheeses, sage, and a generous influence of cinnamon. The distinctive sweetness of squash and cinnamon could almost qualify this dish as a headliner dessert, with further richness provided by a topping of a brown butter sauce and a sprinkle of spinach treated with corn starch to make it amusingly crispy and flaky.

Among the defined homemade desserts are Bananas Wonton Foster, pumpkin pie cheesecake, tollhouse pie, and Karen Moros's formidable rum glazed yellow bundt cake topped with a colorful mojito berry compote. The deeply flavorful and moist cake gave forth the pleasing rum essence, and served as an appropriate energy supplement to reboot from the languorous effects of memorable meal, and bracing for the trip home amidst the fierce winter winds sweeping off the south shore of the Mighty Geist. ☞

Reid Duffy is a noted columnist, author and television personality.