

BITE



Jim and Tracy Frye, owners of Jimmy's Bar and Grill on La Porte Road in New Buffalo, Mich., pose in their restaurant recently. By Bob Wellinski

Chicago eats go east

Jimmy's Bar and Grill brings casual, upscale dining from Chicago to Harbor Country

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NEW BUFFALO, Mich. — Jimmy's Bar and Grill is something of a hidden treasure for residents and visitors of New Buffalo.

With menu items including cedar plank salmon, lobster ravioli and gnocchi, Jimmy's isn't the kind of restaurant you'd typically imagine next door to a Dollar General store.

"It's not what you expect in a strip mall," owner Tracy Frye told The La Porte County Herald-Argus.

Frye and her husband, Jim, opened the eponymous restaurant in November of last year.

"A lot of people come in and ask if it's all right to (wear) jeans," she said, referencing the "upscale casual" atmosphere of the restaurant, open for lunch and dinner Tuesday through Sunday at 11:30 a.m.

The couple drew their inspiration for the restaurant from Chicago, their home for a number of years.

An outline of the city's skyline is superimposed on the windows to complement the Chicago-style food, and lighting in the ceiling was designed to resemble a starry night.

Even native Chicagoans seem to be impressed.

"Our friends from Chicago say we have a better Chicago hot dog than what they've had in Chicago," Tracy said.

The idea to start a restaurant was natural for the couple who owns the strip mall on La Porte Road in which Jimmy's is located.

"I was raised in the restaurant business, and Jim loves to cook," Tracy said.

They wanted to open something special that would be unique to the area.

"We tried to be original with this," Jim said.

And original it is. There is a fireplace in the front left corner as you enter the restaurant, and photographs of music legends like Louis Armstrong, Lena Horne and Tony Bennett line the wall of the seating area.

The 8-foot bar with its cascading waterfall features its own house wine, Fat Cat, which can't be found anywhere else in Harbor Country, the owners said.

The Fryes wrote the menu themselves and tried to include the "entire spectrum," Tracy said. With steak, seafood, pasta, Chicago-style sandwiches and vegetarian options, they come pretty close.

Jimmy's is open year round, signifying its loy-

alty to permanent residents of Harbor Country.

"We have a lot of tourists that come in, but our dedication is to the locals and the regulars who will come year round," Tracy said.

A major part of the Jimmy's experience is the attentiveness of the staff.

"We stress customer service with our employees and how to make people feel special," Jim said.

"A lot of people coming from the casino or Redamak's will call us to see if we're still open," he continued. "We stay open for them."

An added incentive for germophobes: The restrooms are completely hands-free. The sinks, lights, everything, are controlled by motion sensors.

Plans for the future include an outdoor seating area and possibly a second restaurant in the St. Joseph/Benton Harbor area.



The interior of Jimmy's Bar and Grill, New Buffalo, Mich., shows rich hardwoods and classic musicians on the walls. By Bob Wellinski