



VERA CHINESE PHOTO

A scoop of chocolate gelato at Hellenic Snack Bar & Restaurant in East Marion. The dessert is kept at a precise minus-14 degrees Celsius in a special refrigerator. Savvas (left) and George Giannaris scoop up some house made gelato.

Gelato at a Greek restaurant?

Hellenic Snack Bar creates its own traditionally Italian dessert

BY VERA CHINESE
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Now you can get creamy, indulgent gelato along with moussaka, pork souvlaki or rack of lamb at Hellenic Snack Bar and Restaurant.

But owner George Giannaris argues that selling a treat created by Italians is no betrayal of his Greek heritage.

"Theoretically, cannolis are Greek. Baklava is from Turkey," he said. "The Mediterranean cuisine has become like a melting pot."

Earlier this year the East Marion restaurant began serving gelato made in-house in flavors like pistachio, amareno cherry, mocha frappe and — since it is a Greek establishment — baklava.

Mr. Giannaris said he learned the basics of gelato-making at a seminar in western Suffolk County last year. But the course promoted using a pre-made base, which he wanted to avoid. He prodded the gelato maestro teaching the course for his recipe, but the instructor refused to reveal his secrets.

Recalling a perfect gelato dish he'd once had on a vacation to Saint Martin, Mr. Giannaris knew he

wanted to recreate that magic.

So he got to work in the off-season.

"I spent like three months every day trying to perfect the recipe," he said.

He admits the process was intensive and that his family's patience began to wear thin while he experimented. That is, until one day he came home and asked his 15-year-old son Savvas, who also works in the Hellenic's kitchen, to try his recently

made vanilla and coconut versions.

"He was like, 'You got to try this; I think I made a breakthrough here. This might change everything,'" Savvas recalled. "I tried it and was the best frozen anything I've ever had in my life."

When Hellenic reopened for 2017 in February, Mr. Giannaris was ready.

Gelato, like ice cream, is made with milk, cream, sugar, flavoring — and, in Mr. Giannaris' case, egg yolks. Although there are no legal guidelines that specify what is gelato and what is ice cream, most gelato is thicker, creamier and contains less air than ice cream.

For smaller and independent restaurants like Hellenic, the start-up costs can be high. Fortunately for Mr. Giannaris, he was able to program

his ovens to pasteurize the base. And he purchased a small gelato-maker that whips the concoction while it freezes it.

Gelato is also usually served slightly warmer than ice cream — at Hellenic it's kept at negative 14 degrees Celsius or about 7 degrees Fahrenheit — so your mouth is less numb and you're able to absorb the flavor better. That also meant buying a gelato freezer for the dining room.

But, Mr. Giannaris said, it was worth it to make gelato his way, which includes offering inventive dishes like a gelato panini served on warm challah bread.

Theresa Starks, dining at Hellenic with her aunt and uncle Steven and Calliope Kentrotas of Southold, who are regulars there, agreed that Mr. Giannaris' trial and error in the kitchen had paid off. Ms. Starks, who was visiting from Pocatello, Idaho, lamented the lack of Mediterranean cuisine in the Gem State.

"We don't have places like this in Idaho," she said, spooning bourbon vanilla-flavored gelato into her mouth. "Two thumbs up, salud. I'm impressed. Can we bring some on the plane and go home with this?"

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George Giannaris