

Villa Roma is worth the wait

By KIM GILMORE
Times Staff Writer

WEEKI WACHEE — For years, friends have been singing the praises of the mouth-watering food served at Villa Roma Italian Restaurant and Pizzeria. Their vivid descriptions of the authentic Italian cuisine usually are peppered with oohs and ahhs.

Each time I remember thinking the food must be good because despite Villa Roma's out-of-the-way locale, the parking lot regularly overflows.

My husband, Chris, and I decided to see for ourselves what all the fuss was about. We also decided to treat his parents and told them to meet us at our house in Spring Hill in an hour.

Not quite sure what to expect, we called ahead to order out, but the man who answered the telephone at Villa Roma said there were no takeout menus.

Undaunted, Chris and I climbed in the car and drove 10 miles to the restaurant west of Weeki Wachee, placed our order and waited.

Actually, I waited alone most of the time while Chris drove to an automatic teller machine after we discovered that Villa Roma does not accept personal checks or credit cards, only cash.

Meanwhile, I caught a glimpse of our waiter, the cook and other bystanders smoking in the kitchen while preparing customers' food.

Asked about this later, owner Mary Olsen said there's a designated area in the kitchen where employes are permitted to smoke and drink beverages. "No food goes in this area," she said.

All total, my husband and I waited about 40 minutes.

To be fair, we did order a lot of food, there was a large crowd in the dining room, and the waitress had warned us it would take at least 25 minutes to fill our order.

By the time we got home with the food, my in-laws were nibbling on old Halloween candy.

The portions were generous and the food was terrific — a good thing since our eyes were larger than our appetite. The chicken parmigiana was real, not processed. The pastas were chewy, the tomato sauces light. The pasta fagioli soup and cannoli were delectable, and the garlic

knots were robust enough to make your eyes water. Still, the unanimous favorite was the Sicilian pizza topped with chunks of fresh pepperoni, sausage, red and green peppers, mushrooms and onions. The only disappointment was the chicken Romano, which was somewhat bland.

Everything was separated and sealed tightly in foam containers and deep-dish aluminum pie pans. The cannoli and bread were wrapped in waxed paper and placed in individual containers. Best of all, nothing leaked. Despite a 20-minute ride home, all of the food was still hot when we arrived. The containers were easy to reheat later.

The drive to Villa Roma is at least 15 to 30 minutes for most Spring Hill residents more for those living in Brooksville. Since there are no takeout menus, diners should be familiar with the selection. The busiest time is after 5:30 p.m., so call ahead and leave an extra 10 minutes before picking up to-go orders.

Except for a few specialty dishes, prices are inexpensive.

Would we do it again? You bet.

HERNANDO TO GO

Villa Roma Italian Restaurant and Pizzeria

7386 Shoal Line Blvd., Weeki Wachee

Phone: 597-2121

Hours: Open 11 a.m. till 9 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday, 1 to 8 p.m. Sunday. Closed Monday

Consumers: Four adults

What we got: One chicken parmigiana with ziti, one chicken Romano with linguine, one order of garlic knots, one pasta fagioli, one order garlic bread, one side order of meatballs, one 14-inch Sicilian pizza, one cannoli

What it cost: \$37.58

Time it took: Ordered at 6:30 p.m.; on the table at 8 p.m.

Pay with: Cash only