



# Ristorante Farfalla

ESTERO'S OLDEST RESTAURANT OFFERS TASTES OF ITALY

BY LAURA J. CUMMINGS GATES

When Chef Michael Fattah opened Ristorante Farfalla in Corkscrew Village in 1998, it became Estero's first fine dining establishment. As part of the community's earliest retail development at the corner of U.S. 41 and Corkscrew Road (Miromar Outlets was still under construction), Fattah was taking a risk. "Who do you intend to feed, cows?" his wife questioned.

It was a rough first year, but Estero began booming as an outlet shopping destination and a bedroom community for retirees. Seventeen years later, the number of full-time residents has grown from 800 to 30,000, and major employers like Hertz promise to bring a wave of new clients.

No other restaurant in Estero has endured as long as Ristorante Farfalla, weathering seasonal swings and the economic recession, fluttering along as its name suggests (*farfalla* means "butterfly" in Italian).

Fattah has never changed his recipe for success: an elegant atmosphere, authentic Italian cuisine and personalized service. There's never been anything gimmicky to draw the crowds – no live entertainment, happy hour deals or crazy fusions of flavors. He's never expanded the restaurant, which seats 80, because he says he can't mass-produce with quality.

"My cooking is authentic European, classical cuisine," Fattah explains. "I don't cook Americanized Italian. I did not go to culinary school for eight years in Europe for that."

Born in Alexandria, Egypt, Fattah was classically trained in Switzerland before working for fine restaurants in Bergen County, New Jersey. He butchers his own meat, sources produce locally and cooks everything to order, accommodating all dietary needs. "I do everything from scratch; I have no jars, no cans," Fattah says. "I truly am an old-fashioned chef." ■