

## **Tastemakers: OPA! Coney & Grill/Timber Ridge Resort Microbrew Color Tour**

Rick Coates

Opa! Coney and Grill

I remember the first time I went into a Greek restaurant: it was the Parthenon in downtown Lansing back in 1981 and I was immediately made to feel like family. The owners, George and Maria Kafantaris, sat down and joined me, and before I could open the menu, they were ordering food for both me and my date. It was at that moment that I learned that eating wasn't just about the food - it was about a celebration. I was a junior in high school back then and became a regular. Every time I went in, Mrs. Kafantaris would pinch my cheek and tell me I was too skinny.

When Paul and Brigitte Barbas opened Opa! Coney and Grill a little over a year ago in Traverse City, they did so with that same sort of "let's create a dining experience" philosophy. Though the Barbas have yet to pinch my cheek, they do go table-to-table and talk to their guests. Now, Opa! is not your old school Greek eatery; it has a contemporary approach, blending the best of the "Old World" with the new. In fact, Opa not only celebrates the Greek tradition of Paul (he was born in Greece), but also the Polish heritage of Brigitte, by offering menu items of traditional favorites from both cultures.

Despite the tempting Greek offerings (especially the gyros), I am a sucker for a good coney dog and Opa! delivers in this department. They offer both the Flint and Detroit styles, and since I like both, the TC Combo is perfect as it includes two of the same or one of each, fries and a drink for \$6.99. So what makes these coney dogs so good? Well, Paul grew up making them at his parents' restaurant, the popular Astoria Coney Island in Livonia. Opa! Coney and Grill is located at the Cherryland Center (near Younkers). The quaint restaurant features artwork from area high school students, good old-fashioned service and great food at affordable prices.