

Dining out

By Stacey Kratz

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I think the Wasatch Front is, and always has been, more diverse than stereotypes may suggest.

Take, for instance, the continuing contributions of our Greek community. I don't think there's an area of local life — business, politics, religion, you name it — that Greek Utahns haven't influenced. And Utah's continuing appreciation shows yearly in attendance at the hugely popular Greek festival.

Yes, many of those people attend the festival for the food. But it's hard to fault that — Greek is one of my favorite cuisines, too. There are tons of good Greek restaurants here, from the Athenian in Ogden and Dask's in Cottonwood Heights to this week's review, Mad Greek.

Mad Greek is owned by the Tzakis family, former proprietors of Hellenic House, and takes a fast-food approach to Greek dining that doesn't skimp on either quality or taste. We recently enjoyed meals at both the 900 East location and the gleaming-new Draper store.

One great thing about Greek food is its kid-friendliness. Kids love pita bread — my very finicky 6-year-old will even dip it in yogurt-cucumber sauce. They love souvlaki. They love the lemony rice and salty feta cheese.

But I ate Greek long before I had kids, so visiting Mad Greek for a recent weeknight dinner was great for all of us.

We tried the 900 East store, one of Mad Greek's oldest, a diminutive building with a teensy dining area that's really a sheltered porch with a good heater. This shows Mad Greek's walk-up and drive-through origins, with the newer restaurants boasting larger eating areas.

We started with dolmathes, plump grape-leaf rolls filled with savory lamb and rice. They were moist, not greasy, and rested on a bed of lemon rice. We also had some spinach-and-cheese pie, spanakopita, which in Mad Greek's version is deep-fried to a crackly finish.

For their meal, the kids shared a chicken-souvlaki platter. This platter usually comes with two sticks of souvlaki plus rice and salad, but I ordered an extra stick so that each girl would have her own. Combined with the sides, our appetizers and an occasional bite of Mom's or Dad's food, they had plenty to eat. And the souvlaki is mar-

Mad Greek

Rating: ★★★

Where: 4500 S. 900 East (other locations at 12300 S. 600 East, Draper; 50 E. 2100 South; 3965 W. 5400 South; 4700 S. Redwood Road; 171 N. Redwood Road)

Hours: 9 a.m.-10 p.m. daily (hours at different locations may vary)

Payment: Major credit cards accepted; no checks

Phone: 266-4501

Wheelchair access: Easy

velous: four big chunks of meat, moist and tender inside and deliciously seasoned and browned outside.

I had the gyro platter, a fresh pita wrapped around mounds of dark gyro meat topped with tomatoes, onions and tzatziki sauce. It's rolled firmly and wrapped in waxed paper to make eating less messy.

I always like gyros, and this one was great, with a nice combination of browned-and-chewy meat, and more tender inside cuts. Mad Greek's aromatic lemon rice is topped with a dollop of red sauce, and the salad was fresh and tangy with its house dressing.

By the way, Mad Greek offers nine varieties just of gyros, from the more familiar original, chicken and veggie to far-out options like shrimp sauté with feta, and pork sirloin with grilled onions and mushrooms.

My husband had the divine meatloaf, proving that if you want sit-down-style food, Mad Greek can take care of you. Despite resting in a square Styrofoam takeout container, the meal was nicely presented, a thick slice of juicy, deeply flavored meatloaf topped with gravy and bright mixed broccoli, carrots and cauliflower, plus rice and salad on the side.

For dessert, the kids and husband slurped down chocolate shakes with a mellow, caramel-like finish, and I had the rice pudding, simple, deliciously milky and flecked with cinnamon.

Breakfast platters (served anytime) \$3.95-\$5.95, gyros \$3.95-\$4.95, combos and platters \$7.95, chef specials \$3.95-\$24.95, sandwiches \$1.95-\$3.95, salads \$1.95-\$6.45, sides 75 cents-\$3.95, desserts \$1.35-\$2.95.

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