



A FAMILIAR LOCALE GETS A MAKEOVER AND WE GET SCHWARMA.

# Long Overdue

## Kebaba brings flavor of Beirut to Bend

BY LAURIE J. RICE

Living in the Bay Area for most of my life gave me ample exposure to my favorite genre of food. Restaurants featuring cuisine from Lebanon, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries were plentiful, and they ranged from greasy spoon to fine dining.

After a short period of withdrawal due to the lack of ANY Middle Eastern cuisine in Central Oregon, I remedied my cravings by learning, as well as a white girl can, how to make my favorite middle eastern dishes.

I fiddled with my hummus recipe, marinated lamb for what seemed like eons and even attempted to make pita bread. While I perfected tabouleh and tzatziki, at least to my tastes, there were other flavors I couldn't quite master.

Although I will continue my quest for perfect Middle Eastern food produced from my kitchen, we now have an alternative to making our own falafel and babagnoush with the opening of Kebaba.

Fulfilling a long time goal, the lawyers-turned-pizza purveyors of Pizza Mondo, John Picarazzi and Steve Koch, partnered up with Eric Leyden to make Kebaba happen.

An extensive face lift and partial remodel of the craftsman house on Newport, which most recently housed Newport Avenue Grill and Natalia's, has set the building apart from its former incarnations. Colors reminiscent of an Oriental rug, custom metal and stonework on the patio, built in banquettes and warm wood floors give both the inside and outside dining options a relaxed, ethnic feel.

The menu offers many of the classic Middle Eastern dishes such as kebabs (skewered meats, fish and vegetables), falafel (chickpea patties) and mezzas (a combination of small plates of dips and finger food). But it also includes harder-to-

find items like schwarma (lamb or chicken marinated in a schwarma marinade and roasted) sandwiches, karanabeet (seared cauliflower with a tahini sauce) and even a few P.C. items like curried tempeh.

Attending the soft opening with a friend that had actually grown up in Saudi Arabia – and was as anxious as I to sample Central Oregon's first Middle Eastern fare – I was able to glean an "expert" opinion (as expert as opinions on taste can be). Our overall impression was one of excitement and satisfaction as each plate of well-prepared food was brought out and devoured.

Standouts were the hummus, which my dining partner said brought back memories of the Phoenicia Hotel in Beirut circa 1975; the lamb kebabs that were melt in your



SOFT OPEN SAMPLING AT KEBABA

mouth tender and spiced to perfection; the falafel patties that were pleasing light; and the chicken schwarma. Although disappointed not to see the huge spit of rotating, roasting meat schwarma, the flavors and texture of the dish made us both happy.

The pita bread, an integral part of any Middle Eastern meal for scooping, sopping and shoveling, is made in-house and is fresh and warm when it arrives at your table. Kebaba has a hard liquor license and makes a mean martini with Monoplova vodka and fresh pomegranate seeds, as well as offering the perfect non-alcoholic "digestive" – Turkish coffee. Thick and sweet, there is no dessert needed.

As Bend expands at exponential rates and we complain about traffic and housing prices, out palettes can be thankful that with that growth comes the support and the demand for more ethnic restaurants. In my mind, a good Middle Eastern restaurant is long overdue. [info@tsweekly.com](mailto:info@tsweekly.com)

### KEBABA – \$-\$\$

1004 NW Newport Ave,  
318-6224. Mon-Thurs,  
11am-9pm; Fri-Sat, 11am-  
10pm; Sun, 11:30am-  
9pm.