

WINTER FOOD FINDS

Up North

Local 'foodie' discovers plenty to eat on the Iron Range—no matter the season

BY SARAH JOHNSON

Like many fellow state residents, my family owns a “cabin” in Northern Minnesota. I put it in quotes because it’s more of a lake home with all the creature comforts of our house in Minneapolis, so is available for year-round use. Located on Lake Vermilion, the area is a Mecca for every type of winter activity you can imagine.

While I love the natural beauty of the northwoods (*National Geographic* once named Lake Vermilion one of the most scenic lakes in the United States), I’ve often encountered one distinct disadvantage to visiting during the winter—many restaurants on the Iron Range adhere to summer-only hours. Undaunted, as a self-proclaimed foodie, I still have discovered a few year-round stops for every meal.

BREAKFAST

My family and I have spent many mornings at the Wayside Café near Tower. Owners call their place “the all-day breakfast café” and with good reason. While their traditional takes on omelets, French toast, and pancakes are satisfying, I almost always order the stuffed hash browns. You can get them nearly any way you want—filled with meat, vegetarian, southwest style, smothered in their homemade sausage gravy...they have the market cornered on things to do with potatoes!

LUNCH AND DINNER

For lunch and dinner, excellent options are two legendary family owned restaurants. Opened in 1960, Gordy’s Hi Hat in Cloquet is famous for its burgers and onion rings but the main restaurant is only open during the summer. However, less well-known is that the owners opened The Warming House next door in 2005, a year-round

café offering their fabulous homemade chili, daily soup specials, and a variety of sandwiches and pastries.

They’re also a full service coffee house (my favorite indulgence is the Peppermint Pattie—similar to the Mint Condition at Caribou Coffee), and even have their own Warming House coffee line. My dad gave the Vermilion blend two thumbs up, which promises “a rugged roast on the counter that’s next to the stove that’s in the cabin that sits by the shore that’s under the sun that reflects on the waves that call you north.”

Someone said every great Italian restaurant must start with a great red sauce. The owners and chefs at Valentini’s Supper Club, located in Chisholm since 1934, certainly understand this. While the interior décor is decidedly “old school” (some would call it dated), the entrée selections are top notch with all of the classic pasta dishes of lasagna, ravioli, and its legendary homemade meatballs (which are also available at Target Field during Twins games). Valentini’s even has a tasty gluten free chicken parmigiana smothered in the restaurant’s homemade tomato sauce that is the perfect blend of flavor and spices.

Any frequent visitor to Iron Range restaurants will inevitably encounter the three P’s: pasties, porketta, and potica. Sunrise Deli in Hibbing, the oldest family owned bakery in Minnesota, has been providing these ethnic specialties for almost 100 years. Potica is an Eastern European strudel made from thin dough and layered with walnuts, butter, cream, and vanilla (yes, it’s as good as it sounds). Pasties are handheld meat pies filled with vegetables and sealed in a pastry crust. This culinary invention was a popular on-the-go lunch choice for miners. Annie Forti, the second-generation owner of Sunrise Deli, developed her own variation incorporating pork, bacon, spinach, and potatoes that is still sold today.

Porketta, an Italian pork roast seasoned with fennel, garlic, parsley, salt, and pepper, is also sold at the deli, which is housed in the old Lybba Theater. Once owned by Bob Dylan’s uncles, the theatre was



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Two great places for food up north in the wintertime: the Sunrise Deli in Hibbing, housed in the old Lybba Theater, and Gordy's Warming House in Cloquet. Photos by Sarah Johnson.

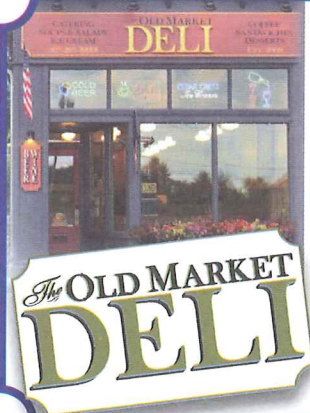


named after Bob's grandmother, Lybba Edelstein, with the famous singer/songwriter attending movies there many times while growing up. Additionally, you can find the Sunrise Creative Gourmet pasta line at many Twin Cities area coops.

The Italian Bakery in Virginia can help satisfy your sweet tooth. It was first opened in Eveleth in 1905 by Joe Marcaccini and later taken over by his sons Geno, Guido, and Larry. They moved to Virginia in 1960 and sold the business to Joe and Bette Prebonich in 1987, with Joe having worked at the bakery since 1965. Not

only do they have potica, which can be shipped anywhere in the United States, they also carry a full line of cookies, donuts, apple fritters, and many varieties of fruit filled kolatchkies made daily in their scratch bakery. They were named one of "60 places worth the trip" by *Midwest Living* Magazine and were profiled on an episode of "Ethnic Eats" by the Food Channel.

Shh. Do you hear that? The northwoods is calling you this winter—take advantage of the scenic beauty and winter recreation offerings, and don't forget the food. ☺



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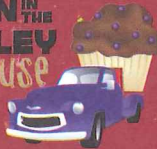
THAT'S SFA

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