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## Good Food, Good Works: Gourmet Café Hosts 'Make a Difference Mondays'

Local chef has raised over \$9,500 for worthy causes.

By [Steve Sears](#) | December 19, 2010

PHOTOS (4)



When Matt Pierone purchased the [Gourmet Café Italian Bistro](#) three years ago, he knew immediately what he would offer: upscale, casual dining and Italian cuisine.

He didn't plan on "Make a Difference Mondays," which raises money for charity.

After Pierone was approached several times by people seeking donations, he decided to use his restaurant to raise money for worthy causes. At his first event, he donated 10 percent of his sales to Relay for Life. Since last year, he's supported charities like Push to Walk, Community Home and more. "Make a Difference Mondays" has raised a total of \$9,500

"I did it for two reasons. I wanted to give, and I wanted to raise awareness," said Pierone, a restaurant veteran who has worked at Rod's Steakhouse in Madison and, most recently, the Racquet Club of Short Hills. "It makes me feel great."

The Gourmet Café was originally opened in 1992. When the prior owner was looking to sell, Pierone, a High Honors New York Restaurant School graduate, purchased it. "I wanted customers to feel comfortable here. It took me about a year to break the old serving habits that were ingrained here. We have nice servers, we cleaned it up, changed it to an upscale, casual décor, and we also display paintings done by local artist Lois Sanders," said Pierone, a veteran of West Orange's Highlawn Pavilion,.

Gourmet Café accommodates 43 patrons. He goes to the market daily and personally selects his seafood and meats, and every lunch or dinner entrée is made to order.

"Two things are key: fresh food and quality, and being accommodating to my customers. That's very important," he said.

And his signature dishes? "Our filet of sole is excellent," claims Pierone, describing an entrée made with fresh spinach and capers in a toasted garlic wine sauce.

"Our pork chop is very popular as well," he said. The pork is a combo of Italian sausage, sweet and hot peppers, potatoes, onions and mushrooms in a light red sauce. Highly recommended as well is a huge

bowl of tomato basil soup, the house soup at Gourmet Café, and the often requested bread pudding topped with caramel ice cream.

Lunch is a busy time for Pierone and crew, as are Friday and Saturday evenings, when the restaurant fills by 7:00 p.m. Reservations are heavily recommended.

Matthew Pierone is supported in his endeavor by his wife of 24 years, Rosemary, and his children: Dean, 13; Sophie, 12; and Isabel, age 9. They're very proud of their Dad. "When it comes to this business, it's a leap of faith. You can't quit. You work at making it better."

*Gourmet Cafe Italian Bistro*

*136 Baldwin Road*

*(973) 316-0088*

*Monday dinner 5:00 PM to 8:00 PM*

*Tuesday through Saturday dinner 5:00 PM to 9:00 PM*

*Sunday dinner 4:00 PM to 8:00 PM*

*Saturday afternoons and Sundays are available for parties.*