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THE BUZZ ON BUSINESS



JIM MACLEAN/RIVERTOWNS ENTERPRISE

Hugo and Maria Cocucci with Sumita and Shishir Bhattacharya outside Calcutta Wrap & Roll.

Couples ad spice to Addyman's offerings

By David Maggiotto

After a year and a half of renovations and red tape, Calcutta Wrap & Roll opened on Nov. 1 at 465 Ashford Avenue in Ardsley, serving authentic Indian cuisine from many of the country's regions and specializing in takeout and delivery.

The business is owned by three couples: Shishir and Sumita Bhattacharya of Irvington, Chitta and Sohini Saha of Purdys, and Hugo and Maria Cocucci of Eastchester. Most were present at Calcutta Wrap & Roll on a recent Saturday afternoon, when Shishir Bhattacharya sat down with the Enterprise at one of the restaurant's handful of tables to discuss the new business and his philosophy of Indian cuisine.

"The layering of spices" is a concept that Bhattacharya likes to return to, referring to the complex and slow building of flavors that to him is at the heart of Indian cooking. He explained that the term "spice" does not refer to heat, but to seasoning, which may or may not produce a spicy sensation. "Indian cuisine has a certain disadvantage — it cannot be quick-cooked," Bhattacharya said.

It can, however, be heated up and prepared to eat in a hurry. This is exemplified by the business' namesake offering, which in India is called a nizam or a kebab paratha roll. The roll — which Bhattacharya pointed out is often called a wrap in the U.S. — consists of naan, the Indian flatbread, filled with chicken or paneer (a high-protein, mild cheese) egg, red onions, and a blend of spices. The rolls cost \$4.50 for one or \$8 for an order of two.

Maintaining authenticity in the food is part of Calcutta Wrap & Roll's mission. "If we're cooking a fish dish from Bengali, it

should be the way my grandmother cooked it," Bhattacharya said. Another goal is keeping prices low — very few dishes on the menu exceed \$10.

This project marks the owners' first foray into the food service industry. Shishir Bhattacharya and Hugo Cocucci are physicians with an obstetrics and gynecology practice in Yonkers, which Bhattacharya founded in 1987 and Cocucci joined in 2001. Sohini Saha is an engineer for the Metropolitan Transit Authority. Both Bhattacharya and Saha are from India and met after moving to the U.S. Cocucci was raised in Rockland County.

The group hatched the business idea three years ago with a plan to open in the Rivertowns, where the Bhattacharyas are longtime residents. They lived in Dobbs Ferry before moving to Irvington with their daughter, Piyali, and son, Romit, 20 years ago.

After shopping around the area, the group found the space in Ardsley in the middle of 2009. The storefront last served as a real estate office.

Their business adds another food establishment to Addyman Square, which already boasts Thai House, Fiesta Mexicano, Nishi Japanese Restaurant, Ardsley Pizza in the Square and Bubba's Grill and Tavern. Bhattacharya does not see the nearby competition as a detriment. "On the contrary," he said. "People might visit the Thai place, see us, and say, 'Next time we'll go to the Indian place.'"

After signing a lease, the owners hired a team to significantly increase the size of the basement and build a commercial kitchen. When the adjacent storefront became vacant, the owners negotiated a new lease

with the landlord and knocked down the separating wall, which allows the business enough space to comfortably accommodate a few tables.

Altogether it was an arduous process. "We didn't expect it would take this much time," Bhattacharya said of the pre-opening phase, which also included sorting through an unforeseen amount of "rules and regulations." During this time the owners also worked to locate food purveyors and chefs to prepare the dishes on a daily basis. "It's amazing how many jobs a small business can create," Bhattacharya said.

Bhattacharya visits India every year for two weeks, with an upcoming trip planned for December. While in his home country he performs surgeries and offers medical counsel free of charge. He also participates in what he calls "[his] continuous culinary education," eating at restaurants and meeting chefs who provide insight into the techniques of the country's cuisine.

Bhattacharya's passion for food is evident, and he said his dream is to build the business's Web site so that it offers the histories of each dish on the menu. He explained that Indian cuisine has been evolving for 5,000 years, and that much of what typifies the cuisine today was actually the result of outside influences. Red chilis, for example, are not indigenous to India, but were brought over from South America by the Portuguese.

Bhattacharya explained that the term "curry," which for many casual eaters typifies Indian cooking, is not necessarily embraced by Indians. "If you asked my grandmother to cook curry, she'll say she doesn't cook British food," he said. Nonetheless Calcutta Wrap & Roll features a chicken curry (\$7.95) and

lamb and goat curries (\$11.95), which are described on the menu as being cooked in "a rich & spicy onion-ginger-garlic sauce."

The owners are planning to hire a nutritionist to analyze the calorie count of a number of dishes that will be highlighted for health-conscious patrons. "Just because you're on a diet does not mean you can't enjoy Indian food," Bhattacharya said.

On Saturday, an older woman dining at one of Calcutta's tables stopped to thank Bhattacharya as she was getting up to leave. She commented that the Rosomalai she had eaten — a dessert of sweet cheese soaked in milk and flavored with cardamom and pistachio — had been true to the Bengali specialty she remembers eating in her native country.

Bhattacharya beamed. "That makes me proud," he said as the woman walked away. "It means that I've done what I want to do."

Calcutta Wrap & Roll is open Tuesday to Sunday from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. Delivery is free for orders over \$10 and to locations within a 5-mile radius of Ardsley. Orders for delivery or takeout can be placed by calling 591-2222, and the full menu can be viewed online at Calcuttawrapandroll.net.

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