

Takeout shop in Hull specializes in Mediterranean and Middle Eastern fare

By **Ann Trieger Kurland** Globe Correspondent, October 30, 2012, 6:00 p.m.



Stuffed grape leaves. DEBEE TLUMACKI FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

HULL — Twelve years ago Paula Cofman had an unforgettable meal. She was invited to dinner at the home of Rafca Cardoos, whom she met through a friend. Cardoos was raised in Byblos, Lebanon, and learned to cook from the elder women in her family. She came to Boston 23 years ago to join her brother. The meal was simple: lamb and green beans. But for Cofman, the food evoked memories of the aromas and flavors of the dishes

she learned growing up in Worcester with her extended Lebanese family. “I couldn’t believe [Cardoos] cooked so similar to my aunt Adele. It was so exciting for me.”

Cofman’s aunt, Adele Aboody Mac-Koul, and her family, owned El Morocco, the once famous Lebanese restaurant and nightclub in Worcester. She was also a chef there. The place has been closed for two decades and her aunt died 14 years ago. “People always felt great after eating my aunt’s food. Their mood changed,” says Cofman, whose dream was to someday run a food business with Cardoos. Both are experienced cooks. Cofman was a personal chef for five years and Cardoos and her husband, Alan, have owned several restaurants. (Alan’s cousin Ron Cardoos is a well known specialty-foods consultant and importer.) Cofman and her husband, Mark, a Boston Globe sports editor, moved to Hull from Worcester.

Finally, three years ago, Cofman and Cardoos opened To Dine For, a small, unadorned takeout near Nantasket Beach. They use recipes passed down from their families (Cofman is half Greek) to cook homemade Middle Eastern and Mediterranean specialties.

On a recent afternoon, two large bowls of lush, lemony hummus sit on the work table in the shop. The chickpea puree is divided to make flavored varieties, with Bulgarian feta and lemon rind, red bell pepper, cilantro with cardamom and coriander, or za’atar, the Middle Eastern herb and spice blend. Each is spooned into containers and drizzled with olive oil. “We thought it was sacrilegious to add flavorings to hummus, but we did it anyway. People asked us for it,” says Cofman. The partners now churn out 60 to 70 gallons a week to sell at their store and to wholesale accounts, through their catering business, and at South Shore farmers’ markets.



Lebanese spinach pie, chicken kebabs, and feta cheese pie. DEBEE TLUMACKI FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE/GLOBE FREELANCE

Next, Cardoos lines the table with rows of outsize California grape leaves. “These are the best,” she says. Cofman fills them with ground beef laced with an aromatic Lebanese spice blend and Cardoos rolls them into short cigars, folding in the ends. The women work as a team. “We have different strengths,” says Cofman, as she alternates between the computer, to track orders, and the work table.

Everything is freshly made, often by hand, including thin crusted lamejuns (similar to pizza), meat pies pinched into squares, tabbouleh, baba ghanouj, feta cheese pies, chicken kebabs, moussaka, and spanakopita.

Cardoos bakes date-filled ma’amoul, the traditional Lebanese cookie made with semolina. She grinds black cherry pits and adds them to the dough with orange blossom and rose water. The results are crunchy and fragrant. Cofman bakes baklava, and instead

of honey uses a simple syrup with rose water, resulting in slices that are light and not too sweet.

Though the women are committed to preparing everything from scratch, they don't make their own pita.

Not yet.

“It's coming,” says Cardoos.

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