

RESTAURANT
REVIEW

DINNER IS SERVED Carl Falcone, Executive Chef at Bender's Restaurant and Tavern, shows the Roasted Halibut with Charmoula Hummus and green beans.

Bender's Restaurant stays true to its roots

By Saimi Rote Bergmann | Photos by Julie Botos

Seafood connoisseurs do not have to travel to Boston or San Francisco to enjoy top-quality fish that's been harvested at peak season and prepared by a skillful hand. They only have to get to Bender's Restaurant & Tavern in downtown Canton.

Despite a harsh economic climate, witnessed by the closing of several restaurants nearby, Bender's continues to thrive. When I visited on a recent Tuesday evening, the dining area was full. And nearly every diner I saw ordered seafood.

The menu offers a steak or two, but mostly stays true to the maxim "Do what you do best." The permanent menu and multiple special and seasonal menus offer an array of

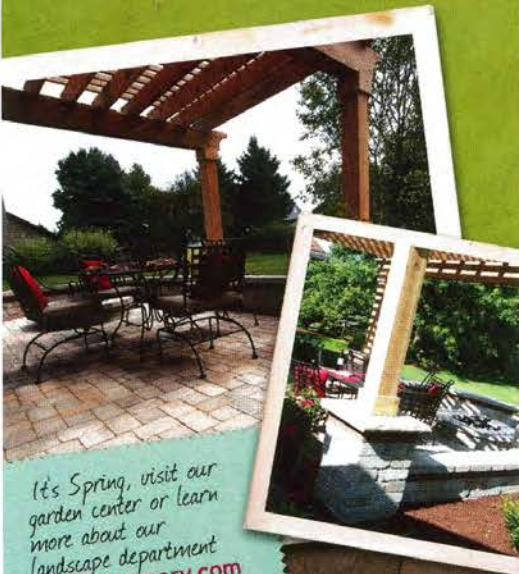
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Bender's was opened in 1902 by Ed and Anna Bender — and is still housed in the historic Belmont Building at 137 Court Ave. SW.

REASON NO.12

WE ACTUALLY USE OUR PATIO. TOGETHER.

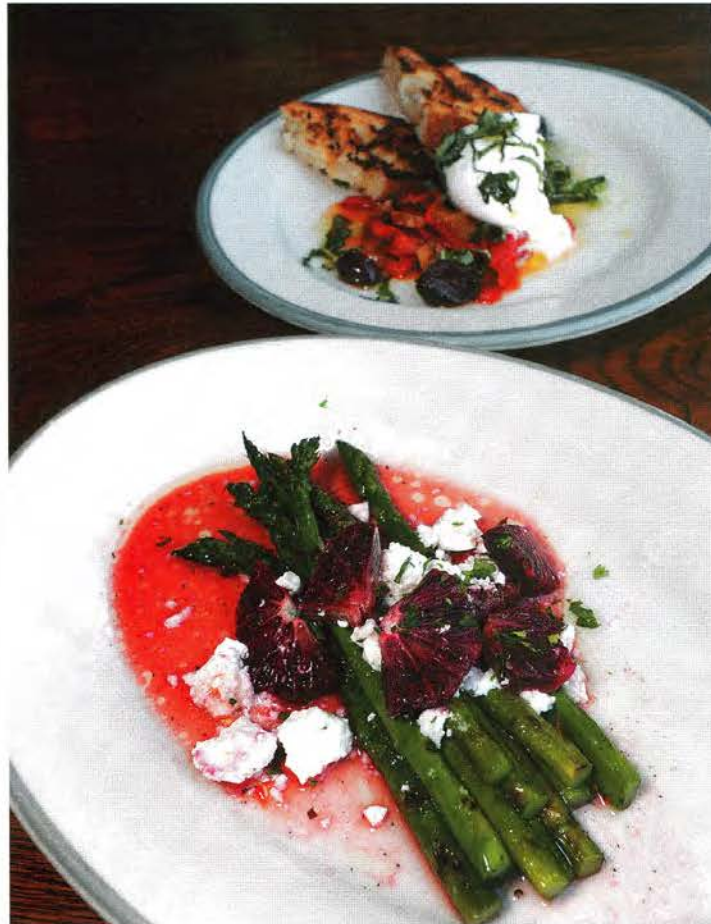
Once upon a time there was a family who avoided their patio. Evenings were cold and dark, afternoons hot. No privacy, no place to sit, boring, why bother? Enter the firepit, flowering shrubs, rustic pergola. Stone seating wall, path lighting & evergreen privacy. We love happy endings.



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TAKE YOUR PICK
Popular small plate dishes at Bender's include grilled asparagus with blood orange vinaigrette and feta (front) and the Burrata cheese with roasted peppers, olives and basil (back).

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fish and shellfish you won't find elsewhere in Stark County.

We started with a Bender's mainstay — an appetizer of smoked mackerel coated in cracked pepper, accompanied by a cup of tangy horseradish sauce for dipping. The texture and smokiness were perfect. Smoked trout, a newer offering, is proving popular with diners who prefer a slightly less oily fish.

From the small plate menu, we chose the chargrilled asparagus, beautifully plated with a luscious blood-orange sauce and a sprinkling of mild feta. Small plates are relatively new at Bender's, but have been well

received, according to general manager Jon Jacob.

"We started small plates for the First Friday crowd," Jacob said. "They're good for people who might not want a whole, full dinner. They can come in, get a couple small plates to share."

Another option for those who don't want a whole meal is a bowl of the lobster bisque, which has earned executive chef Carl Falcone many kudos. This labor-intensive dish begins with the roasting of lobster shells in order to make a flavorful stock.

"We deglaze with brandy, use lots of fresh tarragon," Falcone said. "The bisque is pretty amazing."

The spinach salad is worthy of note, an artfully arranged plate of greens topped with individual mounds of crumbled hard boiled egg, bean sprouts and fresh mushrooms. It pairs well with the sweet and sour dressing, but if you're willing to pay extra, the hot bacon dressing hits that fine line between sweetness and vinegary tartness.

Bender's most popular seafood entrée for many years was the Lake Erie walleye, but Jacob says the halibut has moved to the No. 1 spot.

"By far, the fresh East Coast halibut served a la Foley style is the most popular. Also, Carl's been doing a special (halibut) with hummus and a fennel relish," Jacob said.

Many entrees are only available seasonally, including swordfish, which migrates from Florida to New England in early summer.

"We only serve swordfish when

it's swimming up around Rhode Island and Massachusetts. The fish are feeding better and the meat gets nice and fatty," Jacob explained.

Sole is available year-round, and Falcone prepares it a myriad of ways.

"The most popular is the Oscar style, with grilled asparagus, lump crabmeat and Hollandaise sauce," Falcone said. "It's fabulous, like the traditional Oscar dish, just on fish instead of veal."

Falcone's sauces, side dishes and accompaniments are seasonal, creative and just plain fun. The sole we tried was paired with a mushroom bread pudding, a savory treat reminiscent of stuffing.

While Bender's offers many desserts, from creme brulé to cheesecake, I can never resist the mini-sundae topped with its trademark glob of warm, peanut butter-

BENDER'S RESTAURANT & TAVERN

137 Court Ave. SW, Canton
www.bendersrestaurant.com
330-453-8424

Open: Monday-Thursday,
11 a.m.- 9:30 p.m.;


Friday, 11 a.m.-10:30 p.m.;

Saturday, 5-10:30 p.m.

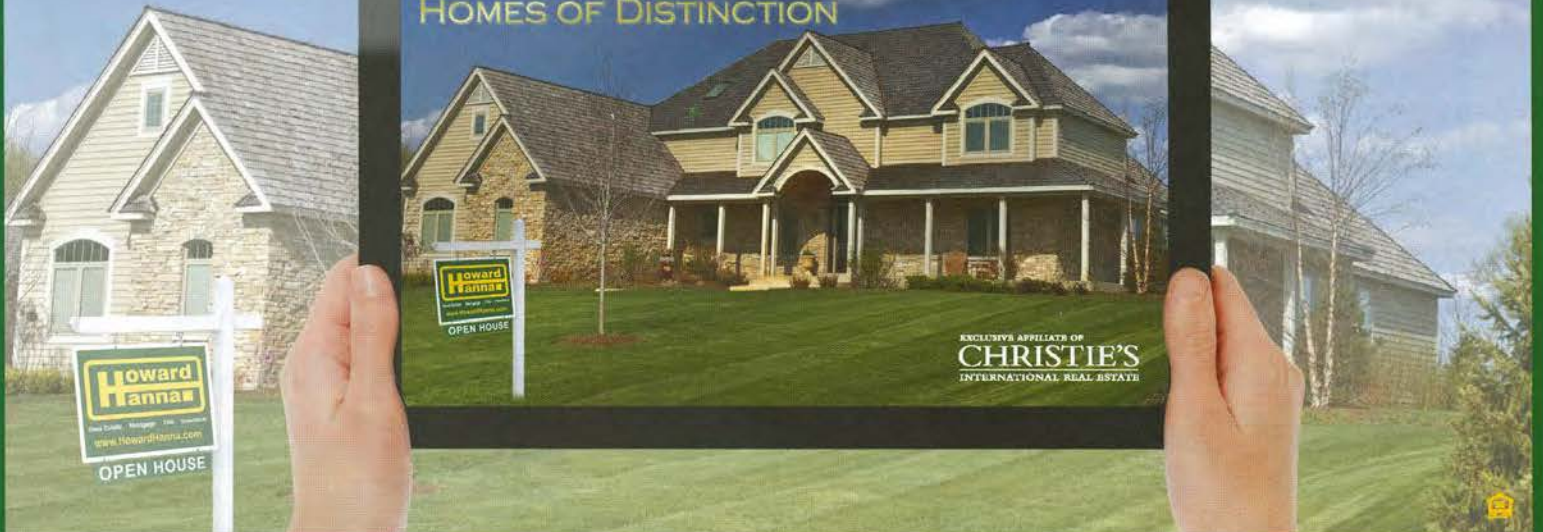
Prices: Lunches, \$8 to \$12;
dinners \$19 to \$34.

Reservations recommended,
especially on weekends.

fudge sauce.

Bender's was opened in 1902 by Ed and Anna Bender. Jon Jacob's great-grandparents, John and Cora Jacob, took over the restaurant in 1932. Jon's father, Jerry, is the current owner. The restaurant is housed in the historic Belmont Building at 137 Court Ave. SW. 

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