



# Wine & Dine

ON THE FIRST COAST

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## TABLE TALK

# Welcome to Amici 2022



by LEIGH CORT

Chefs/restaurateurs doesn't usually start by owning their own kitchens. Freddy Underhill, owner of Amici Restaurant in St. Augustine Beach, had a roller coaster journey long before he and his wife Jenn purchased this well-

known, family-owned establishment in March 2020. It wasn't the most opportune month in American history, but their incredible family and small staff gathered together to breathe life into his dream. Together they brought it back into focus by winter 2022.

Chef Freddy's philosophy of putting love into food began when he worked in a neighborhood pizzeria washing dishes as a 13-year-old in Newtown, Connecticut. Similar to an actor who "waits in the wings for that first break," he was given chores that built his character — learning how to



Chef Freddy Underhill behind the scenes at the restaurant.

crack eggs, take orders, do food prep, and finally, he was given the reins to make a great pizza himself.

Efficiency, quality ingredients, preparing food that people love and purveying local ingredients were some of the important tenets of his later teen years at the Center for Culinary Arts. His energy kept Freddy on course between schooling and working



Freddy and Jenn Underhill

PHOTOS BY LEIGH CORT

full-time, realizing "the more he learned, the more he respected the food."

There are many coincidental stories about Freddy Underhill's connections to St. Augustine, especially with his wife Jenn's family and his moving to Palm Coast.

Finally, they, too, landed in Northeast

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## AMICI

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Florida with a string of great restaurant opportunities for this young, spirited and passionate chef. For 13 years, he worked at Sunset Grille, graduating from sous chef to executive chef. Early 2020, when Freddy and Jenn purchased Amici and enlisted the talents of many family members, the Amici team placed first or second in every category of the annual Chowder Debate with New England Clam Chowder, Minorcan Conch Chowder and the wildly distinctive Creamy Datil Celery Chowder.

No doubt that Amici was ready for Freddy's innovative dishes that reflect his go-getting personality. Instead of limiting himself to narrow traditions of Italian favorites, his menu features numerous signature cult dishes like Pancetta Candita (aka candied bacon + datil) with Maple Candy Glaze and Pineapple and Fresh Clams Simmered in Lemon Garlic Broth served with homemade bread. After years of hearing endless suppositions about Italian food and tossing them aside, what's left



Amici Antipasto

is his curated menu of classic dishes with an Italian "heart," plus Freddy's exploration of unique combinations and flavors. Hint: With 10,000 taste buds on our tongue, the Lemon Artichoke Scallops served over angel hair pasta topped with lemon cream and artichoke sauce might become my lifetime favorite.

Entering the much-anticipated 2022 Taste of St. Augustine, Freddy wowed the enormous foodie crowd with the Grand Prize for Best Upscale Dish: Pancetta Candita atop Plantain Pancake with Smoked Tomato Aioli, Grilled Pineapple and Citrus Gremolata.

The excitement at Amici doesn't stop with awards. The fresh in-house made



Scallops & Shrimp Lemon Artichoke Sauce

PHOTOS BY LEIGH CORT

pastas are wildly popular as guests create their own dishes by combining the shape of a pasta (from gluten-free fettuccine to bucatini), a sauce (Wodka Vodka sauce, garlic & oil, basil cream, Alfredo or meat sauce) then a topping (veal, chicken, sausage, Maine lobster, meatball or fresh catch) ... all made-from-scratch, obviously.

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# AMICI

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If you feel that you have a sharp sense of the meals you yearn for, if you want less ritual and more reward, you can meander to the menu selections that are chef's specialties — like the luscious Chicken Francese with a fresh lemon butter that makes you encourage everyone at the table to try it. Or the Lombardo Marsala Chicken or Veal that teases you with its rich aroma long before you start twirling the spaghetti! Freddy's food is relentlessly unfussy — with sauces that you just have to enjoy to the bottom of the plate. He doesn't hold back, counting on his guests to explore some of the nuances of what he's creating behind the scenes.

Don't be shy about journeying away from rich Italian favorites; if you're a ribeye fan, you might easily fall in love with the Grilled Prime Ribeye accompanied by Maine lobster tails, perfectly roasted potatoes and crispy green beans. It's an exciting dish that changes with the seasonality of a multitude of unique accompaniments.

And then if you must, Amici's pizzas are

what lure patrons to "take out" or "dine in" with Freddy's delicious combinations of handcrafted masterpieces. Whether it's topped with a profusion of locally sourced toppings or a wildly fun Chicken Pot Pie Pizza, this happy staff of servers and managers will guide you through many options to please your pizza mood of the day.

Jenn and Freddy are a great husband/wife team who care deeply about their staff as much as they care about their guests. Freddy's "girls" know exactly how to care for the guests from arrival through service, allowing Chef to take care of his kitchen and "back of the house" team. Giving people a chance to shine, whether in the kitchen, at the table or bar, is what the original Amici family believed in, too. Their well-appointed special event ballroom isn't just for weddings, family reunions, fundraisers or corporate meetings. The fun is attending a comedy night or murder mystery while enjoying one of Chef's themed buffet dinners.

The Underhills have narrowed the field this year for family-inspired Italian eateries. It's still about an old-world casual ambience, whether at the bar, in a booth or inside



Grilled Prime Ribeye & Maine Lobster

PHOTO BY LEIGH CORT

the arched wall dining room. Amici is a neighborhood institution; when you step inside it's like mid-century unpretentious relax! Have a glass of Italian vino or ask if Freddy's No. 1 mixologist Kelley Fitzsimmons has made his secret Limoncello for a happy ending!

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