

Links.

A GOURMET EATERY

BY ALLISON CANDREVA

It started with an idea eight months ago. David Sinopoli and Justin Giangrande wanted to create an eatery that serves healthy meals from quality ingredients at a fair price.

On Aug. 27, "Links. a gourmet eatery" was born.

"You don't have to pay a lot to be healthy," said Sinopoli, co-owner of Links. "People just don't know that."

Sinopoli, 24, said he and Giangrande, the other owner, wanted to give University Avenue something lighter and healthier. He said Links is similar to Crispers—a gourmet salad, soup and sandwich restaurant in Florida.

"You come in and you build your own experiences," Sinopoli said.

Giangrande, 24, said Links provides quick and easy service of the highest quality. He said they get their bread and bagels from The Flour Pot Bakery—in the Tioga Town Center—which they get delivered every day. The eatery serves Boar's Head products with a couple of odd toppings for the customers like crushed potato chips and peaches for hot dogs.

"We don't cut corners [with quality]," Giangrande said.

Sinopoli said the eatery is called Links because he and Giangrande were hoping to bring all aspects of eating into one place. Customers can come to Links and have breakfast, lunch or dinner, and the meal choices are always healthy. The staple color, a bright green, is supposed to represent a fresh feeling in everything that the restaurant does. Sinopoli said that they were hoping to target everyone in the community and that there is something on the menu for everyone from lox and bagels to gourmet hot dogs.

Some of the items on the menu are "create-your-own" dishes, and Sinopoli and Giangrande encourage their customers to create meals. Their quality ingredients ensure the best experience, even though the customer's created concoction may not have been the best blend.

"People can really make their own personal imprint on their meals," Sinopoli said.

Some of the create-your-own dishes include salads at \$6.99 and hot dogs at \$3.99. After choosing lettuce for a salad or meat for a hot dog, customers can choose from a variety of ingredients to add to their dish including avocado, pineapple tidbits, strawberries, carrots, grapes, crispy bacon and an assortment of cheeses. Some of the other ingredients geared toward the create-your-own hot dog include chili, sauerkraut, onions, relish, horseradish, and, of course, ketchup and mustard. With salads, customers can choose one premium item, such as Boar's Head honey glazed ham or grilled shrimp.

Other than the create-your-own meals, Links



has a variety of salads, hot dogs, chicken sandwiches and wraps. Some of the salads include a Pear Walnut Salad—with arugula, radicchio, blue cheese and a low-calorie vinaigrette dressing—and a 1926 Cobb Salad which, at \$7.99, is the most expensive item on the menu. The hot dog choices range from The All-American, a 100 percent all beef hot dog with ketchup and mustard, to Gainesville's Famous Chili Dog—chili, bacon, mustard, onions, sour cream and cheddar cheese—Links' most expensive hot dog at \$4.69.

If you're looking for fried chicken at Links, you'll have to go elsewhere. Giangrande and Sinopoli pride themselves on providing healthy choices for their customers without losing great taste. Their Hula-Hula Chicken sandwich, \$5.99, is a piece of marinated

chicken that is "hot off the grill with red bell pepper and a spicy honey golden BBQ sauce with provolone cheese." The Wall Street Chicken, \$5.99, sounds just as amazing with smothered onions, mushrooms and Swiss cheese on a grilled chicken breast. The most expensive chicken sandwich is the Cali Chicken at \$6.99.

All of the wraps served are \$5.99. Customers have the option of a garlic herb or spinach wrap, and the different types of wraps include a Chicken Caesar Wrap, The Philly Cheese Steak Wrap, a Blazing BBQ Wrap and a Wild Turkey Wrap.

For customers who would like more than just an entrée, Links offers combos. For an additional \$2, customers can make any gourmet food item a combo and get their choice of a side—Miss Vickie's Potato Chips, Fresh Tropical Fruit Salad or homemade "Mac & Cheese" prepared daily—and a drink, such as Odwalla Juice, Bossa Nova, Powerade, Fuze, Vitamin Water, fountain drinks or coffee. Links also has an option called "Pick a pair" where customers can pick any two items—a cup of soup, small house or Caesar salad or any standard gourmet hot dog—for only \$6.99.

For breakfast, Links has fruit and yogurt, or bagels with a choice of butter, cream cheese, egg and cheese, or lox/nova.

Sinopoli and Giangrande met at the University of Florida when they were both students. In 2006, while they were in school, they started a company called Social Studies Inc. that does promotions for clubs, concerts and other events.

Sinopoli said they are very in touch with what the student body in Gainesville needs. He and Giangrande created the whole menu themselves and knew that they would have a student-based clientele; hence, the low prices.

"We're not trying to gouge the students," Sinopoli said.

Right now, they said everything is selling evenly and business is great. They haven't done any advertising, but the location—1632 W. University Ave.—gets Links great exposure to customers. During football season home games, Links will be having an Orange and Blue Bloc Party in its parking lot, which includes a Port-A-Party, food, TVs, drinks and a band performing. Sinopoli said in the very near future they plan on having free WiFi.

Links is open Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday from 8:30 a.m. to 3 a.m., and Tuesday and Thursday 8:30 a.m. to 11 p.m. It has catering and take-out, and Giangrande and Sinopoli hope to have delivery by January 2009.

For a full menu, with prices and items with all of the ingredients listed, go to the Links Web site at www.LinksGourmet.com. ☞