

A Taste of La Dolce Vita just a couple of weeks away.

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Standing Beneath handmade, decorative-steel signs announcing the arrival of La Dolce Vita in downtown Western Springs, a passerby sneaking a peek through its smoked-glass windows sees a restaurant seemingly ready to open any day.

Tables and chairs, absent only tablecloths and settings, await roughly 100 soon-to-be dining patrons. Two brick fireplaces standing amid the tables appear just a match stroke away from exuding a glow warm enough to compliment the room's dark, pillard woodwork, splashes of stained glass, mustard faux finishes and red wine accents.

An ample bar area with brass detailing and four flat-screened monitors, awaits another 40 patrons, who will be able to order a full meal or simply enjoy a drink or two, possibly while listening to a live crooner interpreting a Sinatra tune.

As viewed from outside, where a belated but all-to-familiar Midwestern winter chill has descended, La Dolce Vita exudes the promise as a delightful refuge from the foul weather and the sundry concerns of daily life.

Four of La Dolce Vita's owners, including Wayne Spitzer, are cousins, members of an extended Italian family with deep and notable roots in Chicago dining. Spitzer, 43, has been roaming and working in kitchens from a very early age. His mother's family owned and operated Armando's, a landmark at Rush and Superior Streets for 45 years.

Spitzer himself holds a degree in culinary arts from Triton College and has taught at the Chic Cooking & Hospitality Institute in Chicago. His resume includes a stint as head chef at Lawry's for prime rib. Locally, he has worked for the Flame restaurants and helped open Café 36 in La Grange.

In 2000, he joined with his three cousins and others to open the first La Dolce Vita in Lemont. The Frankfort location opened in 2004.

Their Western Springs location will feature the same menu as the first two venues: a mix of Southern Italian seafood dishes and Northern-style meat entrees, crafted by Executive Chef Ralph Greco. Dinner consisting of an appetizer, entree and cocktail or dessert will average about \$30 he says. Lunch will not be offered, but appetizers will be available from mid-afternoon into the late evening.

La Dolce Vita will be one of only two restaurants in Western Springs - the other is Vie - serving beer, wine and spirits. Spitzer says the new restaurant, unlike the other two locations, will offer a "reserve" wine list in addition to standard wine selections, reflecting the community's upscale demographics.