

## Bistro 385 brings new 'Zest', fresh outlook to Aurora's Legion



Some might have the perception that a Legion is simply a place to go for cheap beer, but this is a notion being challenged by local chef and business owner Michael Edgar.

Edgar, a member of the Aurora's Royal Canadian Legion Branch 385, is also co-owner of Zest Up Your Life Catering and had long been using the Legion's professional kitchen to bring his creations to life. Now, he's hoping a new venture will give the venerable institution, which has provided services to Aurora for more than 75 years, a renewed 'zest' and interest among community members.

Last month, Edgar and the Legion launched Bistro 385, a restaurant-style re-imaging of the Legion's dining room, one which is providing a fresh spin on favourite menu items, and additional fare that reflects Edgar's culinary passions.

'We're trying to take the stigma away from what the Legion has become and try to rebrand it back into what it's supposed to be, which is a place where anyone can come and enjoy,' says Edgar. 'There's a perception of cheap beer, but we're trying to elevate that. The Legion is such a staple in the community, but why aren't more people here? It's not just a place for veterans, even though that's what's highlighted, but it can be a meet-up for everybody, especially with our hall, which is 3,500 square feet. People can book birthday parties, corporate events, weddings - it doesn't really matter. I am trying to show them that it's not just a Legion - it's much more.'

Zest Up Your Life, which was founded by Edgar and his wife, Kristina Yeo, has had the Legion's kitchen as its nerve-centre for three years. They started the business during the pandemic and that was just around that time the Legion's chef had left.

'I threw it out there that there is no need to hire another chef because I'm here - why don't we just make a deal where I will do your events and prep your food, bring in your stuff, and then I get to use the kitchen. It's blown up into what this is now, Zest Kitchen.'

'Sometimes the first thing they (diners) think is, 'Legion,' and they have the thought process of, 'I don't want to go there because I know what to expect.' In the first year I was here, I didn't really care because I was just here existing. The second year I became a (Legion) member because I saw the potential and I saw the vision for it. Now I am in my third year, going into my fourth year, and now we can do so much more - not just from a business perspective, but community involvement. A rebrand, a place where everyone can go to enjoy and get help when needed, someone to talk to, someone to bounce ideas off.'

?I could go anywhere and cater at many, many different places, but here is the place where it just feels like home and I am able to do more, and able to offer my services and other things that maybe the Legion isn't able to do, like maybe a more gourmet meal or elevated food.?

Over the past month, Edgar has taken the time to see what sells, what doesn't, and what particularly hits the spot amongst Legion members and other members of the public who have come in for a bite. Some of the favourites are liver and onions, and a new burger with a special ?Legion Sauce,? the recipe for which Edgar keeps close to his apron ? ?this is the only place where you can get that and everyone seems to love it.?

?The name of Bistro 385 highlights Branch 385, but it is my food. That way, when people come in here and they get to try my food anyway, they're like, ?We can do this at the Legion?' Then they start to expect it and when they expect it at the Legion, now we can elevate it, add more, do more, and then the Executives don't have to be setting up chairs ? they can focus on the main parts of what needs to happen around the Legion and I can focus on food and service. A year from now we want to be fully self-sufficient where the Legion doesn't need to worry, I don't need to worry, it's a machine that keeps pumping and there's a lineup down the road for everything.?

Bistro 385 is open for lunch Wednesdays through Fridays from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Royal Canadian Legion Branch 385, located at 105 Industrial Parkway North.

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