

Oracle Inn Steakhouse

Like most great steakhouses, this one comes with a hearty menu featuring prime rib, smoked meat, steak and chili. What sets it apart is the rich history of the place, which dates back to the '30s.

KARI AND ADRIAN DARIMONT DIDN'T exactly plan on going into the restaurant business when they bought the long-shut-

oracle tered Oracle Inn in 2008. The Tucson residents were real-estate investors whose family had bought the nearby 3C Ranch years before and started snapping up commercial buildings in Oracle with the intention of leasing the properties.

"My real-estate-investing rule is, never fall in love with the property," Adrian says. "We didn't follow that rule in Oracle." The couple became smitten with the small community of ranchers, miners, artists and retirees on the northern slopes of Mount Lemmon, so they moved to the ranch. When the real-estate market tanked, the couple realized the old steakhouse could become a viable family enterprise. They put their son Justin in charge of restaurant operations, while another son, Nick, handled renovations on the rambling, 13,000-square-foot building.

With a hearty menu featuring prime

rib, smoked meat, steak and chili, the Darimonts opened Oracle Inn Steakhouse on July 6, 2008. "People were lined up outside," Adrian recalls, "and we did 550 dinners that night. The chef quit after his shift. He was overwhelmed. But we've been going strong ever since."

The Darimonts revived Oracle's de facto living room, dining hall and watering hole, a place where tourists rub elbows with local sculptors while cowboys and miners swap stories with bikers, just as they did for generations.

The Oracle Inn was built in 1938 by Boyd Wilson, the son of George Wilson, who owned the nearby Rancho Linda Vista dude ranch. Crafted of adobe blocks, the inn served steaks and cocktails, and poured champagne for Rancho Linda Vista's wealthy Eastern guests. The Wilsons kept locals coming by building a veritable sports complex, including a roping arena, baseball diamond and golf course, around the restaurant. Subsequent owners added a second story and an expansive sports bar. When

nearby mining operations ceased in the late 1990s, the town's economy took a dive. The Oracle Inn was closed for years.

The Darimonts' renovations kept the historic adobe core of the restaurant intact, down to the main dining room's polished-copper fireplace hood. They draped booths in vintage red-velvet curtains found at their ranch and adorned walls with historic memorabilia that recalls "Buffalo Bill" Cody's and Tom Mix's ties to the community.

They also displayed work by local artists and updated the sports bar and streetside patio.

The beef-centric menu has been tweaked with the help of daughter-in-law Stephanie Darimont, who serves as manager, and includes salmon and pasta dishes; another daughter-in-law, Corrie Darimont, runs the property's grocery store. As a nod to Adrian's German heritage, the restaurant hosts a monthly German weekend, when the menu expands to include schnitzel and sauerbraten, and German beers and wines dot the

bar menu. A signature dessert? Cinnamon-flecked bread pudding, topped with caramel sauce and ice cream.

Although the food is a draw, the Darimonts have also put together an ever-changing events calendar, offering live music, karaoke and stand-up comedy. Lest things get too lowbrow, there are also tango lessons and philosophy-club meetings.

"Our idea was to create a destination steakhouse," Adrian says, "something for visitors as well as locals. I think we did just that." — NORA BURBA TRULSSON

Oracle Inn Steakhouse is located at 305 E. American Avenue in Oracle. For more information, call 520-896-3333 or visit www.oracleinn.com.

