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Dining scene: From crab cake bites to chilled calamari

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Renzo's
Café & Pizzeria

It's great to be back in Boynton. We look forward to serving you!
-Renzo Sciortino

Open 7 Days 11am-10pm

1313 W. Boynton Beach Blvd.
(Located in the Cross Creek Centre just east of Congress on the north side)

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By Susan Bryant, Correspondent
10:29 a.m. EDT, May 20, 2014

Taps Restaurant Bar & Lounge

330 Himmarshee Place, Fort Lauderdale, 954-459-7770, TapsWineAndBeer.com

This Tampa-based mini chain has opened its fourth outpost — its first on the east coast — in

the downtown Himmarshee district.

"We're looking for locations on this side of Florida now and to grow," says founder James DeVito. "I started Taps to fill a void. It's a hybrid between a restaurant and a bar. We're an upscale boutique version of Friday's."

PHOTOS: Miami Fashion Week

Signatures are nine riffs on bruschetta, such as gorgonzola, caramelized onion, prosciutto and aged balsamic (\$10), Hawaiian shrimp taco trio (\$13), roast beef sliders au jus (\$10), lemon roasted salmon salad (\$14) chipotle apricot BBQ chicken sandwich (\$11) and Belgian waffle vanilla ice-cream sandwiches with Nutella (\$12).

The approach is Mediterranean style without frying and minimal butter. "Everything is made from scratch. I call it smart cooking," DeVito says.

The numbers speak for the libations: 32 wines by the glass, including 20 in kegs on tap; 300 beers, including 30 on tap.

Lunch and dinner are served daily amid gray walls, a black tile floor, multiple TVs, high tops and black banquettes accented by orbital chandeliers and eclectic paintings. The front patio offers alfresco dining.

Live music, such as acoustic guitar, is in the works for Thursdays.

Himmarshee Public House

201 SW Second St., Fort Lauderdale, 954-616-5275, PublicHouseFtl.com

On the corner next to the railroad tracks, this upscale tavern that glows from interior bare-bulb signs has launched Sunday brunch from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. six months after opening, along with its first foray into live music.

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The menu is "centered around global comfort food, which has always been our focus at Public House, while offering items that you don't see anywhere else," says co-owner Marc Falsetto.

Giant biscuit sandwiches glistening with honey butter, the size of a small plate, are filled with four choices, such as pork belly with fried egg and rosemary aioli (\$13). Other highlights are Farm House Croquette stuffed with bacon, sausage and cheddar (\$10) and fried chicken basket with giant biscuit (\$16). Besides coconut-crusting banana bread French toast with bananas and bourbon-maple syrup (\$14), other sweet temptations are Nutella banana empanadas (\$9) and bourbon sticky buns overloaded with pecans as rich as pie (\$8).

While the Adam David Band plays eclectic rock, more theater accompanies the Smoking Sangria concocted tableside with liquid nitrogen (\$10), and Lime In D Coconut comes with a straw to imbibe Malibu rum and lime sour from a coconut shell (\$14). DIY Bloody Mary kits supply a bottle of Absolut Vodka and 12 garnishes, such as bacon and shrimp (\$99 per table).

"We wanted to make Second Street a Sunday Funday destination where people can spend the entire day," Falsetto says. "Sundays were desolate before."