



# Hidden Gems: Santino's Steak and Pasta House

by Jackie Duty  
October 8 2021 4:52 PM





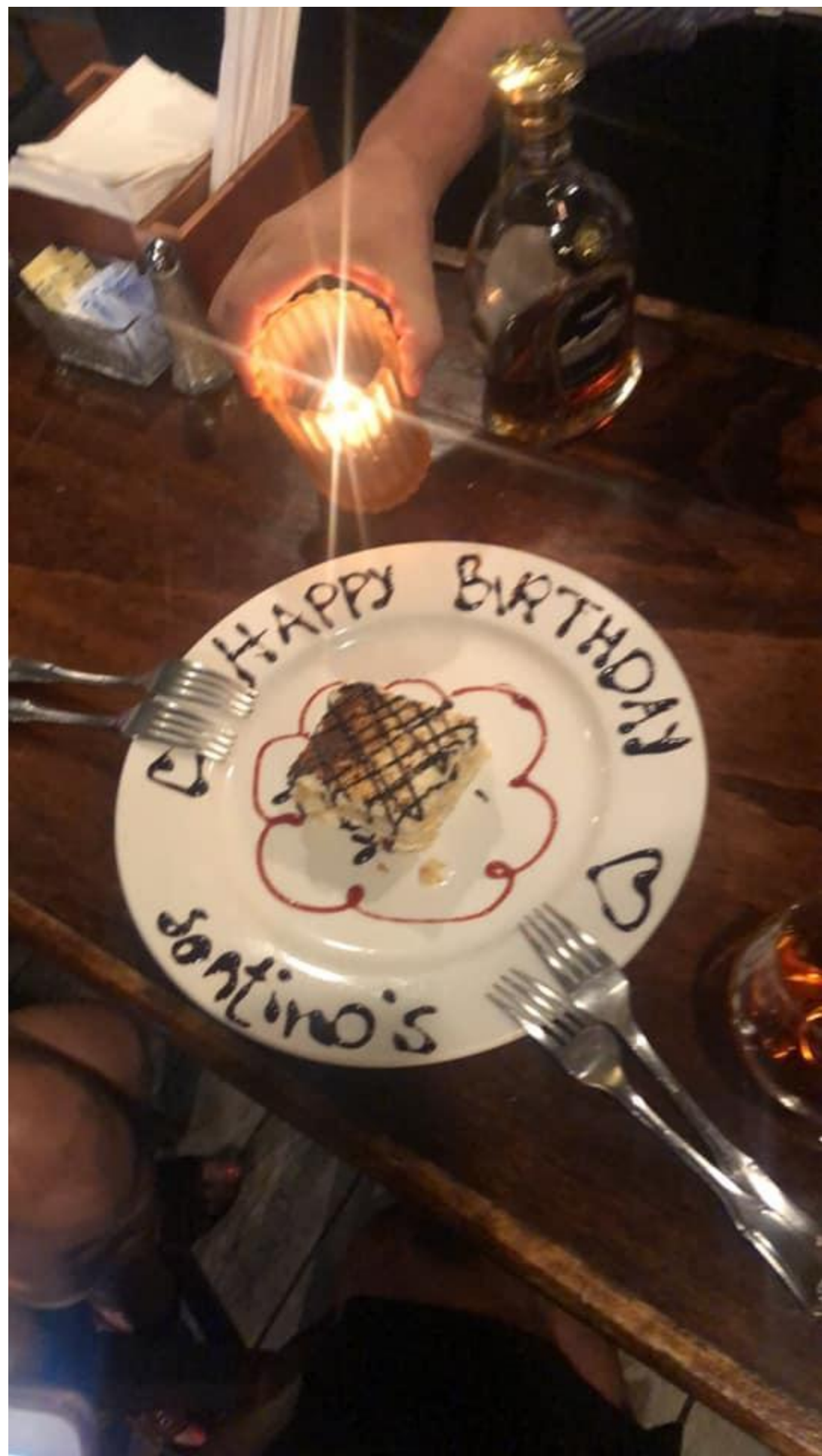
My mother and I used to spend many days traveling to different restaurants to experience unique cuisines. It was an adventure to explore and discover treasures across the Riverbend. Since COVID, our treasure hunts seemed to disappear. I decided it was time to get back out and hunt for new locations to eat. I realized I have not yet experienced Santino's Steak and Pasta House at 180 East Center Drive in Alton.

Walking towards the entrance, I felt a certain nostalgia as I remembered my days of working as a waitress at the old Pasta House. I didn't last there long. I was terrible as a waitress but did gain a new appreciation for the art of serving the public in the food industry.

As I passed the vegetables that were growing in the garden by the entrance, I began to get excited about what I would find inside. I was completely caught off guard by the redesign of the new restaurant. It was beautiful and created an expectation of the high-quality food I would get to eat. My mother's eyes would light up in delight as she received her seafood dish of the broiled tilapia. I knew it was lunch, but I had to try the filet mignon. I could eat steak every day and Santino's did not disappoint. It was wonderful! Wanting to have a better understanding of the management of the restaurant, I asked to speak with owner Sonny Asani and he was so kind and welcoming. He spent a lot of time sharing funny and delightful stories of his history and how this restaurant came to Alton, IL.

Sonny came from Europe at 17 years old. His mother is Italian. His father is Macedonian. Most of his childhood was spent in Macedonia. At 17 years old, he traveled to the United States without the ability to speak any English. He began his career in Oakbrook IL, near Chicago as a dishwasher. He spoke of how he would cry daily because he didn't understand what people were saying. Wanting to gain a better understanding of how to communicate with people, he quit his job as a dishwasher and pursued an opportunity to be a busboy because that would create the chance to learn better English. He gradually gained promotions to a bartender and waiter as he became more effective in learning the language. As he moved to a nice Italian restaurant called Silvano's, he would begin his career as a chef. The first restaurant he started was in 1993 in the small town of Quentin, IL.







## **Why Alton, IL?**

“The first time I came to Alton, I saw this place. It was too good to be true. The restaurant was a great location and the people in the community were so kind. I must start with saying thank you to the community for how they welcomed me and have been so supportive from the beginning. I believe in myself, my work ethic, and my product. I took a risk and am celebrating my third year in business at this location. It was a challenge to get through the last year with the pandemic. We made it. Once again, I have to say thank you to my customers. They have been such a blessing and I am so thankful to be here in Alton. I am so grateful for the support of the community and wish everyone success as we move into a great new year and get back to normal again,” Sonny said.

## **How is Santino’s different from other restaurants?**

“Everything we do is customer-focused. I must share a story from my mentor, an Italian restaurant owner. He looked at me one day and said, “Hey good looking, sit down. I’ll tell you two things in business, take care of your customers, and give them a reason to

keep coming back. People have many choices to go out and eat. Make the experience memorable. Talk to them. Smile at them. Make their day. The food is great, but beyond that it is the experience. People will go spend the money, but they come back to you because they leave with memories and a great experience,” he shared.

Sonny continued, “That is why Santino’s will always provide the best customer service, great food and good portions. We take care of our customers, and they take care of us. At Santino’s we provide a unique menu. Everything is made to order fresh.”

### **What is YOUR favorite item on the menu?**

“I have three favorite items on the menu. The Veal Sorrentino is sauteed veal scaloppine in a sherry sauce, topped with eggplant, prosciutto, sliced tomato and fresh mozzarella. My second favorite is Capellini Frutta Di Mare. It has clams, calamari, mussels and shrimp sauteed to perfection and smothered in a light spicy marinara sauce. I can’t talk about my favorite items and not mention the steaks. I eat steak every day. Our Santino’s steak is a lightly seasoned 12-oz. ribeye coated in seasoned crumbs and flame-broiled to order. It will be cooked in the oven, not grilled so it melts in your mouth,” Sonny expressed.

### **If you had one thing to say to the readers, what would it be?**

“If you haven’t been to Santino’s yet, come try it out,” Sonny said. “We will take care of you. The customer is the most important visitor on our property. You are doing us a favor by allowing us to serve you and treat you to a wonderful meal.”

It was a memorable experience and I can’t wait to get back there with my family.

*Each week I will share my explorations of hidden gems across the Riverbend area. If you want your favorite hidden gem or business to be featured, please email Jackie at: [jackieshiddengems@gmail.com](mailto:jackieshiddengems@gmail.com)*



