

## Do you Gulu? New café offers a twist on European style



Photo by Ian Hurley  
Alicia Marcaurello (Center) brings dessert to the Lugo family who were visiting Salem from Middleport, NY on Monday afternoon, August 6th. From left to right are Alexandra, Lynne, Richard and Richard.

RELATED PHOTOS



By Kristin D'Agostino/kdagosti@cnc.com  
GateHouse News Service  
Thu Aug 09, 2007, 11:24 PM EDT

Story Tools: [Email This](#) | [Print This](#)

Salem -

Like Rick's Café Americain in Casablanca, Gulu-Gulu Café, which opened its doors late last month, comes with a worldly and romantic story.

Its owners, Steve Feldmann and Marie Feldmannova, fell in love in a café of the same name in Prague a decade ago, when Feldmann was a 24-year-old Harvard student and Feldmannova a pretty Czech waitress beginning her first day on the job.

"She was drop-dead gorgeous," Feldmann recalls. "My friend and I stayed there for seven hours ... Finally she wrote her number on the back of our receipt, which I still have."

The original Gulu-Gulu, which had an interesting collection of antiques and a creaky wooden floor, was owned by a Frenchman named Frederic Lasne who obtained it in 1989 after the fall of Communism in what was then Czechoslovakia.

"It was an abandoned building," Feldmann recalls. "He just kicked open the door and set up shop. After the revolution you could do that."

When visiting the café Feldmann would often ask Frederic what the café's strange name meant, but he would just smile and shake his head.

"For years we thought it was a kind of French kinky thing," Feldmann admits.

The autumn after they met, Feldmann and Feldmannova fell in love while frequenting Prague's many cafés, and in 1997 they married, holding their wedding reception in the café where they met.

Soon after, they moved to the United States and settled in Central Square, Lynn. Feldmann took a job as a

Web developer, a position he says was "stifling" because of long hours sitting at a desk in a "cube." Husband and wife began tossing around the idea of starting a café in downtown Lynn, a place they felt lacked a vibrant downtown scene.

In their discussions, Gulu-Gulu kept coming up. Given Lynn's diverse inhabitants, which includes a large Dominican and Indian population, it made sense to bring in Gulu-Gulu, which had served as a hub of the Prague foreign community.

In 2005 the Lynn Gulu-Gulu opened its doors, and given its success, Feldmann and his wife decided to open a sister café in Salem. Its location near the sea was important to Feldmannova who, growing up in a landlocked country, loves the ocean, and the downtown Essex Street location begged for revitalization in much the same way Lynn had.

"This part of town was sketchy for a long time," Feldmann says. "It was uncharted territory because there was a homeless shelter nearby and people would hang out outside on the benches. Nobody wanted to cross Washington Street."

But times have changed. The shelter relocated further down the street, and the "Bewitched" statue draws clusters of tourists to the spot.

"The homeless shelter's moved, the Samantha statue's gone up,"

Feldmann points out, and with his new café, he hopes to attract more people to this part of the city.

### New World meets Old World

In creating the newest Gulu-Gulu, Feldmann and his wife tried hard to recapture the antique atmosphere of the place they fell in love. Feldmann's favorite feature had been a room full of old sewing machine tables. The antique machines were powered by foot pedals that "you could play with while drinking."

Though there are no sewing machine tables in the Salem location, the place is filled floor to ceiling with romantic secondhand furniture that, like the café itself, has a story to tell.

There is an old wooden bench that once sat in a South Boston church, a chandelier from the 1930s rescued from someone's dining room and two wooden folding chairs that once held hockey fans inside a Boston rink.

"The old stuff gives the place a feeling of timelessness," reflects Feldmann, "It looks like it could've been here 50 years ago."

On the menu is a eclectic mix of New- and Old-World food: Italian panini, salads and traditional Czech pub fare like marinated brie, and Utopenec, spicy vinegar marinated sausages.

Behind the bar is a creative assortment of domestic and foreign beer, including a sizeable Belgian collection. Among the exotic foreign liquors is the clove flavored Becherovka and absente, the French version of absinthe, legal in the United States because the hallucinogenic ingredient is removed.

Musicians will hit Gulu-Gulu for the first time this weekend, and blues, country, jazz, folk and bluegrass will continue every Thursday, Friday and Saturday night — with no cover charge.

The café is now displaying paintings by Nahant resident Corey Corcoran, and plans to exhibit different North Shore and Boston artists every three months.

With two Gulu-Gulus planted on American soil, will the café stay in touch with its European roots?

The café where Feldmann and his wife met closed its doors in 1999 when Frederic Lanse lost his lease. Feldmann tried for years to get in touch with the eccentric owner to get his blessing on the American Gulu-Gulu, but he was nowhere to be found.

One mystery, however, has been cleared up. When Feldmann first mentioned the idea of opening a Gulu-Gulu café to his French friend years ago, she told him: "Gulu-Gulu is glug glug in French. It's the sound you make when you have a drink."

*Gulu-Gulu Cafe is located at 247 Essex St., on the corner of Washington Street. For more information call 978-740-8882. Check the Web site [www.gulu-gulu.com](http://www.gulu-gulu.com) to see the menu and find out about upcoming live music, at [www.gulu-gulu.com](http://www.gulu-gulu.com).*