

» JEFFERSON PARK



The theater at the Copernicus Cultural and Civic Center. COURTESY PHOTO

The Copernicus Center celebrates cultural diversity

By KRISTIN KOJZAREK
The Independent

As the epicenter of the historically Polish Jefferson Park neighborhood, the Copernicus Cultural and Civic Center, 5216 W. Lawrence Ave., brings multicultural performances, classes and events to the community all year long.

Before the Copernicus Foundation purchased the center in 1979, the building was Chicago's historic 2,000-seat Gateway Theater – the first cinema in the city to play “talkies.” A 1930 edition of the Chicago Herald-Examiner lauded the new venue as “the most acoustically perfect theatre in the world.” But today, the property is most famous for housing the Taste of Polonia, the largest Polish festival in the city. The four-day event held around Labor Day weekend features Polish food, beer and five stages of live music. It typically draws a crowd of about 3,500 people of all nationalities.

“The Copernicus Center is very popular with different ethnic groups,” said the foundation's managing director, Gregg Kobelinski. “The building is just the right size for performing arts, and it's less expensive than renting a venue downtown.”

Architect Mason Rapp designed the structure to look like an ancient Greek amphitheater. Once the theater's lights are dimmed, the ceiling, backlit and filled with “stars,” mimics the night sky.

To preserve the theater, the foundation worked exclusively on the outside of the building, adding its Solidarity Tower and a brick façade to mimic the Royal Castle in Warsaw. It is now the last surviving atmospheric-style theater in the Chicagoland area. The foundation still plans to build a 200-seat annex next door to accommodate more people.

Together with the Chamber of Commerce and the Jefferson Park Neighborhood Association, the Copernicus Center holds a farmers market on its grounds every other Sunday from June 12 to Oct. 9.

For information, call 773-777-8898 or visit www.copernicusfdn.org.



Rocco Georgiev Soroni, right, owner of Café Soroni, serves Krystyna Liszewska. INDEPENDENT PHOTO BY KATIE A. VOSS

JEFF PARK CAFFEINE FIX

By KRISTIN KOJZAREK
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Jefferson Park visitors don't have to walk far from the Metra stop for a gourmet espresso drink. Café Soroni, 4945 N. Milwaukee Ave., serves handcrafted drinks made with Lavazza – one of Italy's best espressos – just steps from the transit terminal platform.

The Bulgarian husband-and-wife team of Rocco Georgiev Soroni and Sofia Soroni run the independent café.

“Baking is my wife's passion; it's the reason she opened this café,” said co-owner and manager Rocco Georgiev Soroni. “My wife, Sofia, bakes all of our pastries, and we cook all of the food homemade.”

In addition to a full line of coffee drinks, the menu offers freshly baked pastries, breakfast sandwiches, soups, paninis, salads and wraps made with natural and organic ingredients. A full line of organic teas from Vienna is available to tea connoisseurs (and to those who just claim to be).

“Café Soroni beats the other cafés I used to go to,” said customer Jerry Schroeder, who enjoys the blended coffee drinks. “I like that they use natural ingredients in their food and real caramel instead of watery syrup.”

Although the café has only been in business for about five months, it is already gaining some loyal followers. Some customer favorites include the Soroni Special Salad with chicken and the Nutella dessert panini with banana slices on top.

“Business is picking up little by little,” Soroni said.

Menu items are under \$10 and free high-speed internet is available. Credit cards are accepted.

Café Soroni is open from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. Monday to Friday, from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday and from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday. The café can be reached at 773-736-1880.



Quick Look

JEFFERSON PARK

Restaurants

- **Café Soroni**
4945 N. Milwaukee Ave.
773-736-1880
- **Ideal Pastry**
4765 N. Milwaukee Ave.
773-685-4622
- **Gale Street Inn**
4914 N. Milwaukee Ave.
773-725-1300

- **Galvin's Public House**
5109 W. Lawrence Ave.
773-205-0570
- **Theresa II**
4751 N. Milwaukee Ave.
312-283-0184
- **Smakosz Restaurant**
5619 W. Lawrence Ave.
773-205-1771

Attractions

- **Copernicus Cultural and Civic Center**
5216 W. Lawrence Ave
773-777-8898
- **The Gift Theatre Company**
4802 N. Milwaukee Ave.
773-283-7071

Train fare

\$7 Woodstock to Jefferson Park

■ Jefferson Park

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Polonia takes place every Labor Day weekend and features live polka music, folk dancing, Polish food and beer.

A visitor who misses these festivals can still experience live performances

at The Gift Theatre Company – a 30-seat storefront theater at 4802 N. Milwaukee Ave. The Gift has brought drama to the community at prices ranging from \$20 to \$30 since 2006. The Gift also hosts an improv comedy show at 8 p.m. every Wednesday.

After a show, visitors can choose from a bevy of restaurants and pubs for dinner

or a nightcap. The award-winning Gale Street Inn, 4914 N. Milwaukee Ave., has been serving “the best ribs in Chicago,” plus prime steaks and fresh seafood, since 1963.

For Irish fare and pints, visit Galvin's Public House, 5109 W. Lawrence Ave. Guests can socialize on the outdoor patio during the summer

or curl up next to the fireplace on cooler days. Alternatively, for a taste of Eastern Europe, try Theresa II, 4751 N. Milwaukee Ave., or Smakosz Restaurant, 5619 W. Lawrence Ave. Both restaurants have been serving authentic Polish cuisine for years. Many Eastern European delis, bakeries, and cafés pepper the area as well.