

# The Grand Dame of Dining

For nearly a century Scopazzi's has been the restaurant of choice for lumberjacks, silent-film stars and Boulder Creek locals alike

By Ann Parker

Get out the candles. A lot of them. In 2015, Scopazzi's restaurant and lounge will celebrate 100 years of offering food and hospitality at this memorable Boulder Creek site. And like most centenarians, this one has quite a history.

Turn back the clock to the year 1915. Boulder Creek was a bustling little town, its population swelled by loggers working in the surrounding redwood forest. A Hollywood movie studio opened that year on the outskirts of town, adding silent film stars to the mix. And more and more tourists were making the trek to visit Big Basin Redwoods State Park, designated in 1902 as California's first state park.

It was an ideal time for Joe Locatelli to open his Italia Hotel on Big Basin Way. At first more a lodging house for loggers than a hotel, it soon evolved and grew. In 1924,

the spacious redwood dining hall was added, along with a new name: Locatelli's Inn. During Prohibition the inn was a well-known speakeasy, serving locally concocted liquor and wine.

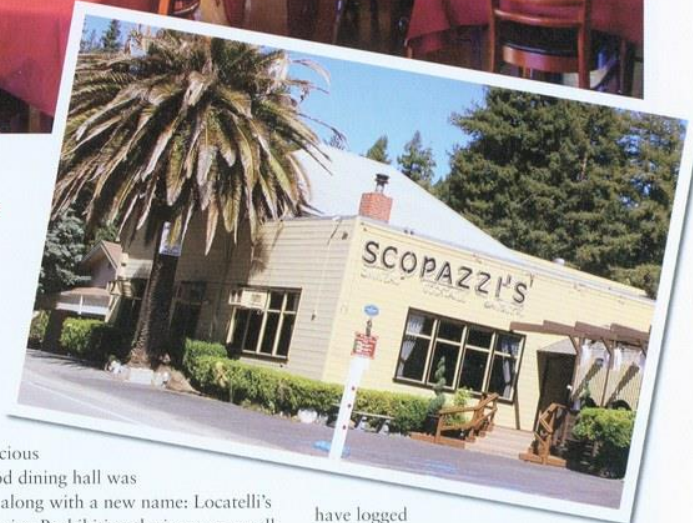
A new family of Italian restaurateurs, the Scopazzis bought the business in 1955, adding a bar and discontinuing the lodging aspect of the business. They also gave it their name, which was retained by Arthur Mangliers and Roland Bohander when the two took over in the '70s.

Fast-forward to 1986 and the passage of Scopazzi's into new hands, two men who were already old hands at the business. The co-partners — current owners Paul Violante and Talal Janbay — together will

have logged 70 years of experience at Scopazzi's when the restaurant hits the century mark in 2015. Violante was originally hired as the chef in 1983; Janbay came on as a busboy in 1973 before becoming a waiter.

A Santa Cruz native, Violante worked in the past with several noted local chefs, as well as helping to open 2525 Main Street in Soquel. But his real start, at age 15,

(Above) Scopazzi's redwood paneled dining room resonates with 100 years of excellence. (Below) Scopazzi's restaurant today.



PHOTOGRAPHS MICKEY CARROLL



was working at Ideal Fish Restaurant.

"I washed the windows — all of them — for \$2.50," he laughed. "I cleaned a lot of fish. And I fell in love with the restaurant business."

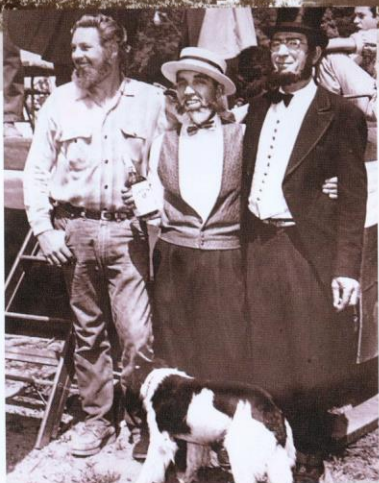
Janbay grew up across the globe.

"I came from a very poor family, in a small mountain village in Lebanon," he said. "I started working at the American University in Beirut, and a librarian there had a brother in Boulder Creek.

That's how I ended up coming here to study computer science at Cabrillo College. You never know your destiny."

The co-owners divide the responsibilities of running the 180-seat restaurant. With Chef Violante in charge of the kitchen and Talal overseeing the front-of-house as maître d', the two work to maintain a fine dining destination with a unique twist.

Scopazzi's atmosphere reflects its history, blending the casual appeal of a rustic mountain retreat with decorative, old-fashioned charm. Antiques grace every room, illuminated by soft lighting from Tiffany-style lamps and ornate chandeliers. What was once the former check-in window of the old inn now holds wine bottles. Even the wait staff's clothing — black pants,



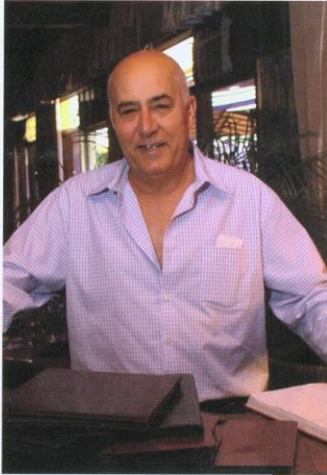
pressed white shirts, vests, and ties — suggests a more cultured time.

"Talal brought in all the furniture and art," Violante said. "And the dress code is his. He has high standards. The place has a lot of character — you don't see that often."

"We're casual but at the same time formal," said Janbay, whose hobbies include finding antiques. "It's part of a fine dining package: good food, good atmo-

(Above) The original Italia Hotel (left) and the new dining room constructed in 1917.

(Below) Johnny Scopazzi Sr. flanked by two of his cohorts during the beard contest at Boulder Creek's Old Timer Days.



“We’re casual but at the same time formal,” notes Janbay, “It’s part of a fine dining package: good food, good atmosphere, good service.”

(Above) As maitre d', Talal Janbay is usually found at Scopazzi's front desk from where he oversees the front-of-house.

(Right) Chef Paul Violante, a veteran of the restaurant business since he was 15, is in charge of Scopazzi's kitchen.



Salmon - Cedar Planked - Honey Mustard, Risotto.



Tossed Green Salad

sphere, good service.”

At the tasty core of that package is Chef Violante’s cuisine, which he describes as “Continental, heavy on Italian.” His diverse menu includes tempting Italian classics from house-made cannelloni and gnocchi to saltimbocca made with free-range veal. The flavors of California shine and are found in the fresh-caught seafood, whole roasted garlic, and seasonal produce. A French influence is evident in dishes such as escargots, calamari bordelaise, and chicken cordon bleu.

And talk about dinner with a show: Scopazzi’s is one of the few restaurants in the Bay Area to offer special dishes prepared at your table. This classic form of food preparation is making a comeback in the U.S., but it never left Scopazzi’s. Table-side dishes such as Caesar salad, pepper steak flambé, Cherries Jubilee, and Bananas Foster were added to the menu in the 1970s and still are as popular as ever.

The loggers and silent film stars are gone. Prohibition is just a memory. But people continue to be drawn to the charms of Boulder Creek, the redwoods of Big Basin, and a 100-year-old restaurant called Scopazzi’s. ♣

#### IF YOU GO

##### Scopazzi’s

13300 Big Basin Way, Boulder Creek

[www.scopazzisrestaurant.com](http://www.scopazzisrestaurant.com)

Telephone (831) 338-6441

Open Wednesday –Sunday,

11:30 a.m.–9:30 p.m.;

closed Monday and Tuesday



Cannelloni a la Romana