

# Spezia Welcomes Mike Vetsch

## Building Community With Great Food

By Charlene Pierce

**Mike Vetsch is the new General Manager of Spezia, and he is thrilled to be part of the team.** A passion for the restaurant business was instilled in him by his mother, who owned a German cafe in their hometown of Aberdeen, South Dakota. One of her specialties was kuchen, a German cake that combines the creaminess of cheesecake and the crumbly goodness of coffee cake with a spread of fresh fruit on top. When Mike recalls her homemade cake, the happiness of his childhood brushes across his face like a kiss from his mother.

Prior to joining the Spezia team, Mike managed Minervas Restaurants for 10 years in South Dakota. Many restaurants did not survive the pandemic, and Mike attributes Spezia's success to the positive work environment and loyal team nurtured by Brian Reilly, who is Spezia's Executive Chef and co-owner. Chef's ability to pivot during tumultuous times helped keep Spezia alive during the pandemic to thrive again today.

Anyone who works in the restaurant industry can tell you that staff turnover is a constant challenge. While Spezia isn't immune to turnover, they don't have the issues that many other restaurants do. Many of Spezia's staff members have been there for years—as long as 20 years! The stability of Spezia's team is reflected in the restaurant's consistent, high-quality service and its long list of reservations. Chef understands the difficult hours better than anyone and strives to provide his team with a work-life balance. The result is a supportive work environment that feels like a community.

The community spirit is a big draw for Mike. He has a friendly, energetic, come-sit-at-my-table vibe and creates a community everywhere he goes. It is one of the reasons he loves the restaurant business. During the pandemic, Mike worked briefly in transportation logistics. He learned a lot and appreciated his time there, but the restaurant business called him back. When patrons from his years working at Flatiron or Hiro 88 find him at Spezia, they greet him with a hug, and Mike feels like he is home.

Mike enjoys cooking, bartending, and experimenting with new concepts and fresh ideas. He created a fun contest for the staff at Spezia. Each person creates their own cocktail for everyone to taste, and then the team selects the winning cocktail to become the featured drink. Even with all the inventive cocktails that Mike has sampled and made, his go-to favorites are still an old fashioned or a black Manhattan.

Mike's favorites at Spezia are the wood-grilled rack of lamb, infused with herbs and tender smoky goodness, and the French Acadian chicken, a Cajun-spiced chicken breast served

over linguine with a creamy Cajun sauce. Mike greeted me with a tiramisu handmade by Chef. It was decadent, with the perfect amount of coffee-cocoa flavor to balance the creamy mascarpone and sweet spongy cake. I would have devoured it in seconds if it weren't for Mike's engaging conversation.

Mike strikes me as the "glass is half full of Chianti" type who easily finds solutions to problems as they arise. It's an important skill for someone who manages a full team in the ever-changing restaurant business. He describes his role as similar to that of a professional swimmer, where the only thing onlookers see is an athlete gliding effortlessly through the water. Underneath, the swimmer is paddling furiously with athletic skill.

Mike, too, values a work-life balance. He and his husband spend their free time gardening, taking their Australian shepherds for walks and to the dog park, and spending time with family. When Mike talks about his upcoming zoo trip with his nieces and nephews, I again see happiness wash over him. Spezia is lucky to have a manager who is as positive and vibrant as he is skilled and professional.

In addition to the dining room, Spezia has two party rooms that are popular for weddings, receptions, holidays, and corporate events. One of them has a beautiful private patio. Spezia can accommodate parties of 30 to 80 guests between the two rooms. To inquire about booking a private room for events, email them at [events@speziarestaurant.com](mailto:events@speziarestaurant.com).

Spezia is open for lunch seven days a week from 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. They open again for dinner at 4:00 p.m. daily. Spezia is located at 3125 South 72nd Street, just south of Center Street. Reservations can be made online through their website, [speziarestaurant.com](http://speziarestaurant.com), or Open Table. For parties of five or more, it is best to call 402-391-2950 to make your reservation. **WE**



Mike Vetsch, General Manager

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