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By Peter M. Gianotti
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Tellers: An American Chophouse

FOOD ★★ ★★
605 Main St., Islip
631-277-7070
tellerschophouse.com

COST \$\$-\$\$\$\$
SERVICE Excellent
AMBIENCE Very good
ESSENTIALS Dinner every day, from 5 p.m. Lunch, Monday to Friday, 11 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Reservations recommended. Credit cards accepted.

Edward Villatoro is the new reason to invest in Tellers.

He's the executive chef at the grand establishment, subtitled: An American Chophouse. Impossible to miss, Tellers is in the three-story, Main Street building that opened in 1927 as the First National Bank of Islip. The restaurant's dining room soars 32 feet. Villatoro ensures it does at the table, too.

Villatoro comes to Tellers from two other stars in the Bohlsen Restaurant Group's portfolio, Monsoon in Babylon and Prime in Huntington.

The steakhouse menu has been refined and expanded in recent years while keeping most of Tellers' original attractions intact. What also remains is a tab that rivals the ceiling's height.

Near the now earth-toned, temple-size main space is a clubby, handsome bar, where the food is the same and the style more restrained. For the record, some very expensive wines are kept comfortably in

the bank's old safe.

What impresses as much as the setting, however, is Villatoro's excellent risotto, with peas, mushrooms, Parmesan cheese and, naturally, braised beef brisket. It's a stirring, fitting appetizer, one that vies with an opener of veal tortellini carbonara.

Black pepper bacon is a huskier starter, a long slablet, house-cured, equal parts sweet and spicy, finished with a horseradish glaze: porkiness rampant. The kitchen also sends out satisfying shrimp-and-lobster wontons, a respectable riff on oysters Rockefeller, and good tuna sashimi with wasabi-shot crème fraiche.

Traditionalists will relax with the ample shellfish cocktails, raw oysters and clams, maybe the seafood tower that includes them. The modest jumbo lump crabcakes, with Old Bay aioli, trail these, but not by much.

The most dramatic entrance — other than the dining room's — is made by the thick, long-bone, dry-aged rib eye, a 38-ounce spectacle, trimmed so that it looks like a beefy racket or a prop from "Game of Thrones." The boneless New York strip appears politely less medieval, but is a terrific steak. If you want filet mignon, just avoid the limp Wellington, in puff pastry with "Brie fondue."

Roast chicken arrives juicy, with cornbread stuffing. And Tellers expertly steams lobsters, 2-pounders and up. The slightly spicy, pan-fried "millennium" lobster is flavorful, on whipped potatoes.



PHOTO BY DOUG YOUNG

The ceilings are high at Tellers: An American Chophouse, in Islip, giving the dining room a dramatic ambience.

Those spuds are outstanding, rivaled by rich, scalloped Parmesan potatoes and a spin on Tater Tots the size of Ping-Pong balls. Try the creamed spinach, five-cheese macaroni and cheese, and roasted Brussels sprouts with pancetta.

Cinnamon-streusel cheesecake with blueberry-citrus sauce is suitably lush. But the multilayered chocolate cake, which you're advised has been imported from Junior's, is a scene-stealer — as if Tellers needs another.



A tower of seafood



Rib eye, Tellers' signature dish