

OLLI AT VANDERBILT

Restaurant Adventures Spring 2017

Restaurant: 312 Pizza

Date: Friday, March 10, 2017

Time of day: 11:30 a.m.

Location: 371 Monroe (Germantown)

Number of attendees: 12

Reviewer: Viv Pocek

Restaurant description: As one diner described it, the feel is that of your neighborhood corner bar. Emphasis is on conversation and a few drinks. The décor and ambiance was super casual.

Seating/overall comfort: Chairs are wooden, but comfortable and functional enough. Tables were actually spaced appropriately apart. No one had problems getting to the tables, including the servers. Regarding bathrooms: There is only *one unisex* bathroom. Lunch time was not a problem, but I sure wouldn't want to be there when it's crowded.

Service: The restaurant was notified days before regarding the size of our party. We were assigned a dedicated server, who did an outstanding job. Food was delivered in an appropriate amount of time, considering the size of the group. Separate checks were not a problem (this was requested ahead of time).

Food: The pizza would rate a C+ grade. Only one person (who ordered the Capone pizza) thought their pizza was good. Those that ordered sandwiches were also disappointed. No one ordered a deep dish pizza, so there was no feedback on this style.

Price: Personally, I think the price of the 12-inch thin-crust pizza is overpriced, ranging from \$13.00 for just a cheese pizza to \$19.00 for the Capone. I've had better pizzas from the neighborhood Papa Murphy's. Sandwiches run between \$9.00 and \$11.00. No one ordered a deep-dish pizza, but they run between \$19.00 and \$24.00.

Beer/Wine/Liquor: Full bar. Draft beer selection is not large but is representative of a large variety of beer types.

Noise Level: We were given 3 reserved tables in a side section, away from the main dining area. Noise level was not prohibitive and conversation was easy. However, there are many reflective surfaces and I would hate to be there when it is crowded.

Parking: Germantown has a real parking problem. Luckily, our lunch was at 11:30 so folks were able to find a street parking or lot parking. I absolutely would not recommend going to 312 Pizza during prime lunch or dinner time.

Overall recommendation: If you're looking for a good pizza or Italian sandwich, there are many better choices. However, the next time I'm in Germantown for some reason, I would have no problem stopping by and ordering a beer and maybe an appetizer.

Restaurant: Edley's Bar-B-Que

Date: Thursday, April 23rd, 2017

Time of day: 11:30 a.m.

Location: 4500 Murphy Rd. (Sylvan Park – across from McCabe Golf course)

Number of attendees: 10

Reviewer: Viv Pocek

Restaurant description: As you would imagine, this BBQ place is extremely casual but super friendly. The emphasis is definitely on the food. It is extremely popular, so it was a good thing we arrived at 11:30 a.m. The décor and ambiance was super casual but it all fit as a package. The restaurant was definitely very clean and tidy.

Seating/overall comfort: All chairs are wooden, but comfortable and functional enough. We were seated at a long table in back which was nice of the manager. I did feel that the tables throughout the place were placed a little too close together – going to the bar for a beer or just trying to leave did mean some serious maneuvering. Bathrooms: Not enough, and definitely not designed to be visually appealing.

Service: You enter a line, order your food, pay for your food, and then are given a number which you place on the table. A server will then deliver your food. The efficiency I observed should be commended. As mentioned before, this is clearly a popular place, so the food order/delivery system makes a lot of sense. For anyone who wants a beer (or other “adult beverage”), you must go to the front bar, order your beer and pay the bartender.

Food: From the feedback I received, I would rate the food a B+. The meats were cooked perfectly, but the sandwiches often lacked just that extra bit to be superb. I ordered the BBQ chicken sandwich and the meat was cooked perfectly. But...I felt the pieces were too large and it could have used more BBQ sauce. I will say the sides were excellent -- I'd go back for the black-eyes peas and coleslaw alone. Many of the folks in the group would happily go back again.

Price: Edley's may not have fancy seats or pictures of celebrities of the walls, but they sure provide an excellent value. The chicken sandwich I had, plus the two sides is \$9.00. A brisket sandwich with 2 sides is \$9.50. Tacos (two tacos -- pork, brisket or catfish) with two sides run between \$9.50 and \$10.50. There is much, much more – check out the website.

Beer/Wine/Liquor: Full bar. Draft beer selection is impressive. You do need to go to the bar as a separate trip and pay at the bar. For me – not a problem and the bartender was highly efficient.

Noise Level: Luckily, we were given several reserved tables in the back of the restaurant. We arrived at 11:30 and we could easily talk to each other after ordering. However, by 12:15, the place was packed and the noise level was much, much louder. The place is certainly popular.

Parking: There is a small (and I do mean small) parking lot behind the restaurant. If you arrive early, you can probably park there, but you may have difficulty getting out if there is an SUV next to you. Apparently, most people park in the McCabe Park parking lot which is across the street and up a slight incline. This looks like a perfect option – it's not that far.

Overall recommendation: The place is not fancy, the seats are wooden, the place can be loud, but the food, for the price is an exceptional value. Many in the group mentioned they would go back, including me. Some suggestions:

- Go after 1:30 p.m. when the place has calmed down

- Park in the McCabe Park parking lot. It's a short walk and you avoid their nasty parking lot in back
 - Always ask for more BBQ sauce. Many folks said great things about the sides, so make sure you get two.
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Restaurant: The Row

Date: Monday, April 3, 2017

Time of day: 1:00 p.m.

Location: 110 Lyle (between 19th and 20th Ave, off of West End)

Number of attendees: 13

Reviewer: Viv Pocek

Restaurant description: The Row serves an interesting assortment of appetizers, sandwiches and BBQ in a nice casual, country music-themed restaurant.

Seating/overall comfort: Chairs had minimal padding, but they functioned well. Tables were spaced far enough apart to provide plenty of room to maneuver. They accommodated us with one long table, so we were able to sit together in a comfortable setting.

Service: A dedicated server was assigned and he did a marvelous job taking orders and explaining the menu selections. Separate checks were not a problem.

Food: Most of the attendees enjoyed their food and would go back. Some highlights include the hot chicken, the deviled eggs, the Cobb salad and the Brussel sprouts. I had the kale salad and was disappointed that the kale wasn't cut more finely (it was hard to eat). I will not order this again. I wish I had ordered the Cobb salad -- it looked wonderful. Two people ordered the turkey and avocado and were deeply disappointed – too much bread, not enough turkey and not enough flavor. As an appetizer, I previously have had the "Pickle Fight" and it was very good.

Price: The food is tasty, the ambiance great, but many people will find the pricing a bit high. Burgers run between \$13.99 and 17.99. The appetizer selection is quite inventive and it runs between \$5.99 and \$12.99. The Hickory Pit BBQ sandwiches (with a choice of side) run \$12.99 to \$15.99. Entrees, including steak, bourbon glazed salmon, shrimp & grits, fried chicken, catfish and more run between \$14.99 and \$18.99.

Beer/Wine/Liquor: Full bar. Draft beer selection is always varied and showcases several local microbreweries.

Noise Level: Our lunch was scheduled for 1:00 p.m., so many of the diners had left. None of us had any trouble with conversation. The music is all country, but at a very nice "background" level. I have been to The Row several times during prime lunch time, and I've never had a complaint about the noise level.

Parking: The Row has a large parking lot next to it. The restaurant does have live music at night, in the bar, so I imagine that parking could be a challenge in the evenings.

Overall recommendation: The group enjoyed the overall ambiance of the restaurant and the convenient location. This is a good place to meet a friend (or two) for lunch. I've never been there for dinner, which has a different menu, but I'm sure the food is good and the service accommodating. For lunch, I would avoid the turkey-avocado sandwich and the kale salad. Everything else should be fine.

Restaurant: City Fire

Date: Tuesday, April 18, 2017.

Time of day: 1:00 p.m.

Location: 610 12th St. (Corner of Division and 12th, in the Gulch)

Number of attendees: 10

Reviewer: Viv Pocek

Restaurant description: City Fire's website describes it as "a lively, casual American restaurant with an eclectic décor and timeless vibe." This is a good description. This large restaurant has ample seating in a very "eye-pleasing" setting.

Seating/overall comfort: Chairs have some padding and are relatively comfortable. Our group was seated at two tables of six in a back area. It was fine, except I think they could have seated us in the main dining area considering the restaurant was not at all crowded. Looking at the main area, the tables are spaced far enough apart to provide plenty of room to maneuver. Bathrooms get an A- minus in my book – very spacious and well decorated. Great sinks!

Service: We had two servers dedicated to our group – each took one table of six. They were great – knowledgeable, attentive and accommodating. Separate checks were not a problem.

Food: Everyone who responded back to me enjoyed their food and would go back again. Of note: the Cuban sandwich with a side of Succotash, Fried catfish house specialty, chopped salad, and the fish tacos. I personally would like to go back and try the chicken fingers, made with blackberry BBQ sauce.

Price: No one who responded complained about the price – it's exactly what you would expect for a nice restaurant in The Gulch. "Beginnings" run between \$5.00 for the deviled eggs to \$10.00 for the pantry platter. House specialties run between \$11.00 for the chicken fingers to \$13.00 for the southern meatloaf. Sandwiches and salads run around \$10.00.

Beer/Wine/Liquor: Full bar. Draft beer selection was impressive. By the way...the bar itself is big and beautiful.

Noise Level: Our lunch was scheduled for 1:00 p.m., and we were placed in a back "private" area. None of us had trouble with conversation. The background music was at a perfect level. On the way to the bathroom, I monitored the music loudness level and it was fine. I don't know what it's like during dinner, but the lunch volume was fine.

Parking: Parking is in the ICON garage just to the right (east) of the restaurant entrance. Parking can be validated up to two hours.

Overall recommendation: The group's overall opinion was very positive and everyone would go back. We had no problems with parking, noise level, service, etc. Things could certainly be different during busier times. I looked at the Saturday/Sunday brunch menu and it looks fabulous. Overall, this is a place to visit with a friend or two -- the food is very good, the location is easy to find and the ambiance is oddly comforting.

Restaurant: Harding House

Date: Wednesday, May 3, 2017

Time of day: 1:00 p.m.

Location: The upper floor of the Belle Meade Mansion visitor's center

Number of attendees: 13

Reviewer: Viv Pocek

Restaurant description: Harding House is a wonderful casual restaurant on the grounds of the historic Belle Meade Mansion serving southern-inspired dishes. The restaurant is quite large and is meant to be able to accommodate a large number of visitors at one time. It is open for lunch Mondays through Friday. On Saturdays and Sundays, they have an expansive brunch.

Seating/overall comfort: The restaurant is large and they were able to accommodate our large group without any problems. Chairs have some padding and are relatively comfortable. Tables have plenty of room between and trips to the bathroom or the gift shop downstairs were not a problem for anyone. The bathrooms are in their own area, near the stairs and elevator. The ladies bathroom was quite large, obviously meant to deal with large numbers of diners at once. Pleasant and functional – I give the bathroom a solid B grade.

Service: All diners were impressed with the service, calling it efficient and pleasant. Our server had complete knowledge of the lunch menu. Our orders arrived in a perfect amount of time, considering we had a large group.

Food: The menu consists of southern favorites and plenty of sandwiches and homemade desserts. The majority of the diners thoroughly enjoyed their lunch. The shrimp and grits were cited as exceptional. I had the BBQ chicken sandwich which was excellent – great BBQ sauce and the portion size was impressive. One person had the meatloaf and stated that he would not order it again because it was on the dry side. Regardless, everyone who responded to my inquiry would return. It should be noted that the menu is large and has something for everyone. Apparently they also do a killer brunch on weekends.

Price: We found the prices to be very reasonable considering the quality of the meals and the portion size. Appetizers are in the \$5.00 to \$10.00 range. House specialties run between \$11 for the chicken fingers to \$13.00 for the meatloaf. There is also a smoked half chicken and fried catfish (that looked excellent). Sandwiches and salads run between \$8.00 and \$13.00.

Beer/Wine/Liquor: Full bar. There is some focus on the Belle Meade label wine. Beer selection is poor.

Noise Level: Our lunch was scheduled for 1:00 p.m., and we were placed in the main dining area but off to the side (the place is huge). The restaurant was not crowded at the time and conversations were easily heard. The place is quite large so I can imagine when it is full, there would be some noise to deal with.

Parking: Parking is in the visitor's lot which is large. No one had problems finding a place to park.

Overall recommendation: All of us would go back. I would go back just for the molasses baked beans. I also want to try their brunch.