

## Dinner and a Movie

## Home-style faves at WhatchaGotCookin'?

I was drawn to WhatchaGotCookin' for two good reasons: its newcomer status and its unique name.

Tucked along the Erie Canal in space that once housed the Lift Bridge Café, WhatchaGotCookin' is the culinary brainchild of co-owners Maureen Brainard and her son, Joe Challenger.

"We're a great team," said Brainard, who recently retired from a distinguished career in financial services. "Joe, a Culinary Institute graduate, handles the cooking, and I handle the customers."

And the restaurant's name?

Brainard said the fun-loving name – taken from an old song recorded by Hank Williams, "Hey Good lookin'" – epitomizes their mission: "We're friendly; we're fun; we're here to please."

## Comfort foods at comforting prices

The lunch and dinner menus at WhatchaGotCookin' are loaded with down-home favorites at reasonable prices. The prices are so reasonable, in fact, that some customers have actually asked Brainard this question: "Why don't you raise your prices?"

"Since we opened in May, we have raised prices on some dishes," said Brainard, "but only a few. Our goal is to stay affordable."

After lunching at the restaurant and lugging home enough food in doggie bags to take my family through dinner, I can confidently say that Brainard has met that goal.

My dining companion and I started with white bean chili, a wholesome soup loaded with chicken, andouille sausage, and vegetables. New to the fall menu, the tasty soup tipped us off to the chef's talents.

Next, we shared a colorful Southwestern salad that was so darn big we honestly thought the waitress had made a mistake and combined two portions into one. Teaming with healthy ingredients – mixed greens, black beans, corn and more – and bursting with flavor, the salad featured chicken prepared in a way we both enjoyed: marinated, dusted with zippy spices and lightly stir-fried.

For our lunch entrees, we selected a highly recommended fried bologna sandwich and a noon special, steak-and-



STAFF PHOTO/JOHN D. HANLON

Maureen Brainard owns WhatchaGotCookin' with her son, Joe Challenger, who also is the restaurant's chef.

## Anne Palumbo

DINING OUT



mushroom pie.

The fried bologna sandwich was terrific – and I'm not bologna's biggest fan. I think what turned me around was the sum of the tasty parts: the grilled ciabatta bread, the caramelized onions, the spicy mustard, the oozing provolone cheese and – last but not least – the ultra-thick, grilled bologna. With an entrée still ahead of me, I dutifully saved half for my husband, a bona fide bologna fan.

All hot and cold sandwiches come with a choice of five sides: chips, fries, potato or pasta salad, and fresh fruit. We went with the potato salad and liked the picnic-fresh flavor.

The steak-and-mushroom pie took me back in time. Although this version had an upscale tilt, with its use of puff pastry and fresh thyme, it tasted just as comforting as what grandma used to make. The dish, which arrived in a small crock pot, was so nice-looking that neither of us wanted to break the pretty pastry seal. But finally we dug in – and what a reward.

The tender meat and plump mushrooms were swathed in rich brown gravy that tasted long-simmered. This dish is also offered at dinner, with a salad.

Speaking of dinner, the whole family's heading there next week. When dad heard they offered home-style chicken and biscuits, he wanted to go. When my vegetarian daughter heard about the black bean burger, she wanted to go. When my fish-loving sister heard about the horseradish-crusted salmon, she wanted to go. And when my husband took one bite of the fried bologna sandwich, he wanted to return for an encore (it's offered at dinner, too). Mom and I? We plan to try their chicken French.

We ended our feast with peanut butter pie, prepared by the in-house pastry chef.

Creamy and rich, it came topped with bite-size chunks of peanut-butter cups.

## Open year-round

Unlike the former Lift Bridge Café, WhatchaGotCookin' stays open all year. Brainard intends to keep the patio, which seats 80, open until the end of October.

"Rain or shine, snow or sleet, we'll serve outside," she said. "We've got enough heat and protection to assure customers a pleasant experience."

**WHAT:** WhatchaGotCookin'  
**WHERE:** 6 North Main Street, Fairport  
**PHONE:** (585) 377-7770  
**HOURS:** Monday to Saturday: lunch, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.; dinner, 5 to 9 p.m.  
**PRICE:** Lunch entrees, \$4 - \$7. Dinner entrees, \$6 to \$14. Kids' meals, \$4.  
**COMFORT:** Casual, wheelchair-accessible (patio: side ramp; inside: small table in front), major credit cards.  
**OTHER:** Catering; takeout; curbside and dockside pickup.  
**WEB:** www.whatchagot-cookin.com

After October, customers can continue to dine inside all year.

## Cozy ambiance, friendly service

Inside, the restaurant is homey and quaint, with its teal-toned walls, exposed brick, and roomy booths with cushioned backs (seats about 40). A pretty mural of flowers catches your eye when you first walk in. Whimsical pendant lamps fashioned from cheery upside-down colanders flood the small space with light. We ate in a prime spot: a booth along the wall that overlooks both the canal and lift bridge.

Our server was super-friendly and attentive – just what you'd expect from a place that offers home-style cooking.