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Menu might make Mom envious

Karen Miltner
Staff writer

(November 2, 2006) — Keeping the tab close to \$10 is tough around the dinner hour, unless, of course, you're basically ordering a late lunch.

That's why a sneak peek at WatchaGotCookin's online menu got me excited. Most of the dinners are in the \$8 to \$10 range and include at least a salad and often a couple of sides. (Not to mention the freebie bread basket that had some terrific honey-sweetened cornbread.)

These are well-balanced dinners portioned generously enough with the next day's lunch in mind. It's all stuff your mom might make if she had the time, the talent and a pinch of Paula Deen sensibilities. Chicken and biscuits. Braised short ribs over egg noodles. Apple-glazed pork chops with an apple and cranberry chutney. Fried bologna sandwiches. Steak and mushroom pie. For appetizers, Southern-fried pickles and Buffalo shrimp cocktail. For desserts, red velvet cupcakes and peanut butter pie.

My happy meal was three slices of herb-roasted pork loin with an apple cider mustard sauce, a side of rippled mashed potatoes (hey, my mom never plated them that way) and creamed spinach, all in a sectioned Melamine plate.

I confess, I didn't need the Post Road Pumpkin Ale and the piece of pumpkin pie cake I shared with my sister. Irresistible seasonal extras like these can put these down-home dinners in the uppity price range. On the other hand, they are nice to have around for those spontaneous splurge urges.

Perhaps the reason Watcha seems to work so well is because there's a mom in charge. Maureen Brainard runs the front of the house while her Culinary Institute of America-trained son, Joe Challenger, manages the creative stuff of the kitchen.

The two encourage customers to share their favorite family recipes (which is how the popular pumpkin cake evolved). If Challenger can successfully translate it to the professional kitchen, it goes on the specials menu and the donor wins dinner for four.

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Karen Miltner is an eternal omnivore and self-avowed vegesexual who is happiest in the kitchen or at the table with friends and family. Prior to being a reporter, she schlepped for various food-related businesses in Seattle. She lives in Irondequoit.



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WatchaGotCookin

Address: 6 N. Main St. (in Box Factory), Fairport.

Contact: (585) 377-7770;
www.whatchagotcookin.com.

Hours: Lunch, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.; dinner, 5 to 9 p.m. Monday through Saturday.

Accessibility: Outdoor deck and restrooms are fully accessible, but only one small table inside restaurant is.

Good to know: Restrooms are in next door lobby (requiring short jaunt outside). Parking in municipal lot behind Box Factory. Free takeout delivery in Fairport village vicinity.

Cheap Eats picks

What I ate: Herb-roasted pork loin with two sides and a salad (\$9), beer (\$4), cake (\$3.50 split with my sister).

Other good deals: Because the dinners include two sides and a salad, I would recommend those in the \$10 and under range, such as the barbecue chicken, pork chops, meatloaf and chicken French (which here is called chicken with an accent). Mac and cheese (\$4), the Reuben (\$7) and soup or salad and half sandwich are \$5.50, available during lunch service.

Not so cheap: Seafood dinners are \$12, steak entrees in \$12 to \$14 range. If you add beer or wine or dessert, you may be forking out close to \$20 for dinner.