

# Gino's East of Dubuque

By Bryce Parks

When we first wrote about Gino's East coming to Dubuque two years and five months ago, the article started with, "We normally would not jump the gun on a new restaurant coming to town..." Well, we apparently should have stayed true to our code. While we knew that despite business setbacks, a change in proprietors, a global pandemic, misread tarot cards, and possible Illuminati involvement, it was eventually going to happen. But as time went by and we told people it was still coming, we started getting eye rolls and sarcastic "sure it is" replies.

Well, doubters, this time as we write about Gino's East of Dubuque we can assure you that, unlike Red Lobster and Whole Foods, this Dubuque unicorn is real. We know this for certain because we just ate there, and it is everything that we have been waiting for over two years to finally experience in Dubuque. Real Chicago pizza. Not just "Chicago-style pizza." But the absolute genius article, from the people who live and breathe Chicago-style pizza. Prepare for a new favorite pie!

Sure, people have their favorite types of pizza, and if you are stuck on a big flimsy piece of New York Style Pizza, you might be a hater who says this is a pie and not a pizza. Whatever, whiner! Call it what you like, when you eat it, you'll be a fan.

To tease you a little longer, we'll wait on the pizza for a minute and look at the rest of the menu, pretending that we care about anything but the deep dish. But Gino's East cares about the rest and has some great things to offer up from appetizers to salads, but clearly, if you are getting the salad at Gino's East, then coming here tonight was not your idea. I mean, you don't go to Graceland to listen to Jerry Lee Louis, right? And if you know the pizza, you know you're going to need all the belly room you can muster.

You don't order appetizers here because you need them to fill up. That's a preposterous notion. This is the place where many mortals will find that one slice is a meal. No, you order appetizers because you can't rush perfection. You will wait 45 minutes or more for your pizza because it simply takes that long to cook a real Chicago deep-dish pizza. But be happy you're not in line



12" DEEP DISH SPINACH MARGHERITA PIZZA (FRONT) AND 10" GLUTEN-FREE THIN CRUST SPINACH MARGHERITA PIZZA (BACK)

at Gino's East on Superior. St. along the Magnificent Mile in Chicago. You might wait twice as long to get in as you do for the pizza to cook. So right there, you are way ahead of the game. And our deep dish took 45 minutes on the nose. So having an appetizer or two to enhance conversation can't hurt, and they have some lovely options to choose from.

Appetizers include big mozzarella sticks and a version with spinach as well, garlic breadsticks, jumbo chicken wings, french fries, calamari, spinach artichoke dip, and charred Brussels sprouts which are the big thing everywhere now. We had calamari and the Six & Dips plate, a mix of cheese sticks and breadsticks with marinara, ranch, and garlic butter dipping sauces. Everything was good, hot, and crispy. We're looking forward to going back for the amazing-looking Brussels sprouts with pancetta, garlic, and panko as well as the decadent-looking spinach artichoke dip.

We admit to not having a salad, but they were also not also-rans in case that's your game. A nice house salad is joined by a kale-based Caesar. We also didn't

even get around to the great-looking sandwiches (oh, but we will!) Served on French rolls, try the classic Italian beef or Italian sausage with a choice of sweet peppers or giardiniera. Get it wet, dry, or dipped. Or hell, get both on the combo. When in Chicago, right? You can also attack a hearty meatball sub with marinara and optional mozzarella or go vegetarian without gettin' anywhere near a diet with the eggplant Parmesan.

You can also get right down to the Italian basics with a big plate of spaghetti marinara or fettucini Alfredo if you are in a hot pasta mood. And who's not in a hot pasta mood all the time?

But enough gilding the lily. If you're not here for the deep-dish pizza, you need to have your head checked. And if you are here for the deep dish, maybe your pulse afterward. Prepare for decadence.

They actually have three kinds of pizza. In addition to the deep dish, you can get a thin-crust pie. It's much thinner and faster to cook and still delicious, and for the gluten-free set, they have a very good 10" crust onto which you



CALAMARI



STICKS & DIPS



CHARRED BRUSSELS SPROUTS  
PHOTO: TOM RAUEN

can pile anything you like. My wife had the gluten-free Spinach Margharita and enjoyed it, especially when it had a lot of spinach and hot red pepper flakes.

As for the deep dish... you will NOT be eating this pizza with your hands.

Let's start not from the top but from the bottom as the crust on these dense magical discs is where the love resonates. It's a non-greasy, cornmeal-based, light, flaky crust, crispy and golden on the outside and a bit chewy on the inside. It's not just a necessary base onto which to pile great ingredients. It's a highlight of its own in every way. You won't see the aftermath of tables full of uneaten pizza crusts as you see at so many other pizza joints. Like the chocolate-filled bottom of a Drumstick, the crust of a Gino's East pizza is the reward for getting through the rest of the slice. Or, if you like to pace yourself on the good part like me, you will make occasional forays to the crust before you actually eat the front part of the pizza. It's just fantastic.

Skipping to the top now, the marinara that goes on the deep dish after the pizza is actually baked is a chunky flavor-filled



12" DEEP DISH MEATY LEGEND PIZZA

layer of spicy goodness. If the pizza looks wet when they dig out your piece, it is not. It's just this marinara slipping down into the pan when it finally gets access to flow.

And that layer in between is drool-inducing. Start with a great tasting mozzarella, straight from Wisconsin and designed especially for pizza. They take their cheese seriously. You choose what makes you drool beyond that. If you are like me, that answer is the Meaty Legend, stuffed with pepperoni, crazy good Italian sausage from Chicago, Canadian bacon, bacon, and love. Specialty pies also include the Chicago Fire with a hot and spicy patty-style sausage, fire-roasted red peppers, and red onions; Gino's Supreme with pepperoni or Italian sausage, onions, green peppers, and mushrooms; the O.M.G., a classic vegetarian with onions, mushrooms, and green peppers; the Spinach Margharita with a spinach cheese blend, cherry tomatoes, fresh mozzarella, and basil; and a unique Italian beef with sweet peppers and giardiniera. They also have their own

blend of vegan cheese if that allows more of your posse to be part of the trip.

Yes, you can, of course, build your own or augment one of their ideas with anything from artichoke hearts and pineapple to meatballs and anchovies.

It's not a cheap pizza, but it's also not a CHEAP pizza. It's not about price; it's about value. So while a 12" Meaty Legend goes for almost \$30, it'll also feed four people or at least two very determined fellows. Either you get it or you don't. Once you experience it, the price of quality is soon forgotten. Build your own large from a cheese base from \$21.50.

The rest of the menu including appetizers, sandwiches, salads, and pasta are in that \$10-\$15 range. So yes, you can come down for less and even get out faster if you don't go deep dish, but man... just plan ahead and book the time.

Full disclosure: we were over-served... cheese. So when they came to offer dessert, we had not a corner of the belly to spare. But even then, we were tempted by a deep dish brownie and fresh-baked cookies which they offered to turn into an ice cream sandwich. Next time, Gino. Next time!

Outside of the Chicago area, the only places you can get a Gino's East pizza are Los Angeles; Arlington, TX; Lake Geneva, WI; Nashville, TN; and South Haven, MI. So we are in select company indeed.

The Dubuque location is set to open in the next two week as final details are being completed on the interior of the dining room. They will also offer carryout and delivery options. The already popular part of downtown will be yet harder to park close to, but then again we in Dubuque are spoiled and lazy about parking. You CAN walk a block to your car like the rest of the world does, and it won't kill you. In fact, after this pizza, I suggest you just park three blocks away anyway to ensure cardio blood flow after dinner. And don't be afraid to over order. I can attest that the leftover pizza is also amazing! ■



**Gino's East of Dubuque**

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