



# Jumpers Sports Bar & Grill

By Danny Fairchild

Now... when I pulled into the back area of the Plaza 20 parking lot, well away from Aldi and Starbucks and Dunkin'... and there still wasn't any place to park, I started to get curious. What business in this part of the plaza could be generating such traffic long about lunchtime? The only thing I could think was that it had to be all for Jumpers Sports Bar & Grill, but I didn't think there was any way that Jumpers could handle that many people.

Well... apparently Jumpers is like a TARDIS—larger on the inside. Because while Jumpers was jumping, nobody was crowded, and we still got a large-top table at noon on a Friday. Ah, Friday! It all started to make sense! I'm not Catholic, but I'm not blind to how big Lent is around these parts. It was Friday, and the big chalkboard touting the daily specials heralded fried haddock, cod, or shrimp. Not that Jumpers doesn't deserve a full parking lot EVERY day of the calendar, but suddenly it made sense: The Catholics.

We'll get into that fish and even that shrimp, but to really get a feel for the food at Jumpers, I'd like you to ponder this statement:

America's favorite flavor is crunch.

I don't know who was the first to say that, but if you think about it, it's true. How many people don't like the taste of pickles or lettuce but like the crunch they add to a sandwich or burger? Why don't we serve ALL our fries soggy and flimsy? Why don't we serve ALL wings with a rubbery skin? Why are they fish FRYs and not fish BAKES, which would probably be easier?

It's the same reason New Yorkers are such jerks about their style of pizza crust: Because of crunch, baby! Crunch!

Now, going one step further: What kind of cuisine encompasses burgers, sandwiches, fries, wings, pizza, and fried fish? Bar food, yo. Guess what Jumpers is? Yup! A bar! You got it!

True, the fact that it's Lent AND March Madness might have something to do with a sports bar doing so well with their fish specials, but anyway.

Let's dig in.

Jumpers is really what you make of it. Sure, you might pass judgment with the handwritten "No vaping inside restaurant" sign. But like... there's a vape store nearby,

so I can see how that would come up even more often than at other bars. I like the chill captain's chairs at the far side of the bar. It's always a treat when I get one of those. From there, it's pretty much where I want to hang out for the night. Being a bar, there's absolutely a pay-to-play dart board but also a cobbled together hoops shooting range that you don't gotta pay to use. Very don't-start-nuthin-won't-be-nuthin.

And the food. There's a reason I went on and on about crunch. Now... you don't HAVE to have the best-tasting bar food around, so long as you can bring the crunch. But it just so happens that in addition to bringing the crunch, Jumpers DOES have some of the best-tasting bar food around.

Let's start with that Friday lunch special: Fried haddock, cod, or shrimp. THAT is what people of the Tri-States were doing at Jumpers at noon on a Friday during Lent. Taking advantage of one of the BEST Lenten specials around. Why is it one of the best Lenten specials around? Because ESPECIALLY when it comes to fish and shrimp, Jumpers knows how to bring that crunch. It doesn't seem like it should be that hard, but how many disappointing fried fish platters have you had in your life? I bet none of them were at Jumpers. So crispy, you can eat everything with your hands and it'll all stay together. But once you crack through that crispy batter, you got that yummy sweet flakiness of delicious Lenten fish. The kind you just pick up and dip into your ramekin of tartar or cocktail sauce (or both) and go to town.

As for the shrimp, the crispiness even rang true when we ordered it on a taco. Now... tacos are priced per taco, but don't go thinking you're going to get a bunch of small street-style tacos, friends. Oh, no. These are American soft shell tacos and therefore take up a plate all by themselves. Flour tortilla instead of corn. And, as you can see from the pictures, they come absolutely loaded. So, like... order two tacos and see where that gets you. You can always order more.

Getting a bit more heathen on a Friday afternoon, we also got the munchie basket and some wings. The munchie basket, as you can probably guess, is Jumpers' appetizer sampler basket. And yes, everything from the chicky fingers to the onion rings brought the crunch. Ugh. I hate soggy onion rings. It's a safe order. But I want to talk more about the wings.

Now, I know from experience that it is NOT always easy to get a nice crispy skin on chicken wings. I mean... how CAN it be, when we immediately toss them in sauce? Even if you try to be sneaky and order the sauce on the side, there's no guarantee you aren't going to sink your teeth into chicken skin like a popped balloon. There





are places I love to go to get wings, and there are places I hate to go to get wings. There's no in-between. I don't know if I've just overlooked Jumpers or forgot about their wings, or just got set in a pattern, but if you want some wings that kick arse? Jumpers, yo. And since they're fairly centrally located with strong road access, if you take these wings home, the crunch will survive—no kidding!

One of our party ordered a pizza burger. No, they weren't 10 years old. But damned if this pizza burger didn't remind me of why kids (but also my partner, Annie) order them so often. And I needed the reminder because these things are a mystery. Take a burger, in this case one that's got a crispy breaded and country-fried. Then you pizza-fy it with mozz and sauce so that it no longer tastes like a burger and it sure as hell doesn't taste like a pizza. It tastes nothing like pizza and is only SHAPED like a burger, but it still tastes good. It scratches neither a pizza itch nor a burger itch, but long live the pizza burger.

But if you WANT a burger, then dammit you deserve one of those

goody-good burgers from Jumpers. I ordered a Carmichael. Now... I know that Jumpers isn't the Dubuque bar you usually associate with a Carmichael burger. I'm not here to start a rivalry or anything. I'm just saying that at this point, the Carmichael belongs to Dubuque as a whole, not a single bar. Not when Jumpers brings such good flavor to their burgers. What is a Carmichael, you say? Short answer: a burger made with seasoned ground beef and both American and Swiss cheese. From there, it gets complicated, and I don't want to start a fight.

The quarter-pound chili dog. Okay, I admit. This one isn't all about the crunch. Not unless you're pro-onion. I mean, look at that thing. There's something delightfully obscene about a chili dog you have NO hope of eating with your hands. You're going to need tools for that.

So yeah! I learned that Jumpers brings some awesome bar food that's closer to my house, and I need to rotate them in on my wing nights. And if I ever somehow decide to be Catholic, I know where a lot of my Friday fish is coming from. ■

- 1. PLENTY OF SEATING IS AVAILABLE INSIDE
- 2. FRIED FISH
- 3. TACOS
- 4. MUNCHIE BASKET
- 5. CHICKEN WINGS
- 6. PIZZA BURGER
- 7. QUARTER-POUND CHILI DOG

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