



OMELETTE WITH LINGUICA SAUSAGE, GREEN PEPPERS, AND MILD MANCHEGO CHEESE



LEEK, ASPARAGUS, AND ASIAGO QUICHE



CORNED BEEF HASH, BISCUITS AND GRAVY, AND CINNAMON SWIRL BREAKFAST SANDWICH

OTTO'S PLACE CAFÉ & LOUNGE

A WARM AND URBANE RETREAT

BY SUNIL MALAPATI

Enough.

A strange little word that is often used in a pejorative sense. Bob Perks wrote a story "I wish you Enough" that puts a different spin on the word. Wishing someone "Enough" is a way to wish a balanced life so they can appreciate what they have and not keep hankering for more and more in this ever competitive world. John Slimp and Dan Wentz, the proprietors of Otto's Place Café and Lounge, have taken Bob Perks' dictum as a guiding principle for their eatery.

Otto's Place invites you to stay a while. John and Dan wanted to create a destination where people can come and enjoy food and drink and have a quiet conversation. The place is on the bustling Main Street on the other side of the Galena River, quietly standing by the railway line. Built at the end of the 19th century by Otto Sallman as a restaurant, but never opened, the place needed John and Dan to come calling early in the 21st century. They loved the building and its location and decided to pay tribute to the builder by calling their new eatery Otto's Place. Warm hardwood floors, bistro style tables and chairs share the space with comfortable couches and small bar areas.

Otto's Place is primarily a breakfast and brunch place. While they do have a weekday lunch menu on Mondays, Thursdays, and Fridays, most of their patrons come for the brunch options. And boy, do they have a lot of patrons! On a recent Sunday, my friend and I waited for nearly 45 minutes for a table. While Otto's doesn't take reservations, you can call ahead and put your name on the waiting list and I certainly would recommend that. If you are not in a hurry (and at Otto's, you do not want to be in a hurry!), you can settle yourself in the couches and hang out sipping coffee or one of their specialty cocktails. Turnover at the tables is unpredictable because many patrons just want to

take their time. The proprietor John Slimp would not have it any other way. He said, "We have the number of patrons we can sustainably handle." Of course, they could increase seating by adding tables instead of couches, or the wait staff could start giving signals that it is time for you to move on after your meal, but that would rob the place of its charm and hospitality.

The menu at Otto's Place reflects the same ethos. "Great home-cooked food," as John puts it. Everything is made from scratch, the portions generous. The menu is packed with breakfast and brunch favorites like omelettes, hashes, quiches, french toasts, and the like. They have a few specialty items on weekends, especially their fruit muffin. The deliciously moist muffin is packed with apple, carrot, and coconut with nuts and offers a panoply of textures. Dan Wentz, chef and one of the proprietors, is also a fabulous baker and the muffin offers a good preview of what is to come.

On one visit, I tried the Country Benedict: sausage patty on top of a buttermilk biscuit smothered in country gravy and accompanied by eggs cooked anyway you want. The gravy is made with Arnold's Farm sausage and is wonderfully complex, yet mild and does not overwhelm either the buttermilk biscuit or the egg. I asked for my egg to be softly poached and it was perfect: poached just enough for the whites to be softly and completely set while the yolk stayed runny and silky. I am glad I had the half-order as the portion size was extremely generous. I did order a pancake to go along with the Country Benedict and the meal lasted me until a late dinner! The buttermilk pancake was soft and flavorful, especially when paired with butter and maple syrup.

There are few dishes that showcase a baker's skill better than a quiche. The crust must be flaky, buttery, and firm enough to hold the custard, yet gentle enough to cut through with a fork. The custard must be cooked

firmly enough to hold their shape when cut into slices, yet soft enough to have a velvety mouthfeel. The leek, asparagus, and Asiago quiche my friend had met all the requirements for a great quiche. No one ingredient dominated the flavor, and they all combined harmoniously.

One of the weekend specials on another visit was an omelette with linguica sausage, green peppers, and mild Manchego cheese. An Iberian take on Italian sausage and peppers in omelette form, if you will. The linguica sausage is a firm, smoke-cured Portuguese sausage with paprika and garlic, sweeter and milder than chorizo. Manchego cheese can be quite sharp, but the version used here is milder and paired very well with the linguica and peppers. The omelette itself was well cooked. While I prefer my omelettes to be on the barely cooked side, I had no complaints about the egg cookery here. I have to make a special mention of the home-fried potatoes that accompanied the omelette. Cubed into relatively larger pieces compared to a hash, the potatoes were browned perfectly on the sides while staying soft and moist in the center.

A good brunch place needs a good selection of cocktails and Otto's offers a fascinating array as well as a full bar. Mimosas and Bloody Marys are expected, but given novel twists here. Bloody Mary (I can't stop humming that old Rodgers & Hammerstein number!) is a vodka-tomato juice cocktail with acidity from lime and lemon juices, and heat from celery, Worcestershire, horseradish, and hot sauce. Otto's offers multiple versions with different vodkas, including Galena's own Blaum Brothers vodka, gin, or bourbon. All of them come with hot Cheetos on top, for that perfect touch of whimsy. You can also get a pepper sausage, pepper jack cheese, and jalapeño Bloody Mary!

The Otto Mosa is a mimosa variation with St. Germain adding floral notes. This might be my new favorite



MUSHROOM AND SWISS BURGER WITH BACON



PORK TENDERLOIN

a marina t-shirt because if anybody goes into the drink, they have to wear something. That's marina cuisine.

Imagine a pizza being put down in the middle of the table. What kind? Who cares? You're too hungry and sun-drunk to argue. But if it matters to you, it's half meat lovers and half taco. (Note: Danny hates taco pizza. But before you food him with hate mail at dining@dubuque365.com, please appreciate that he ate it anyway. For you.) Imagine that the lettuce HASN'T wilted from the heat of the pizza because it's served up fresh. Imagine a taco pizza that doesn't require all the hot sauce and sour cream in the world to be palatable. Imagine a meat lovers pizza that lives up to the name. Imagine a pizza sauce liberally applied...almost socialistly applied, that is bright in color and flavor and a little fennel-forward. Imagine a cracker crust that doesn't fall apart upon taking a single bite. Imagine all that... with a salad bar shaped like a boat that doesn't look like it will ever again serve as a boat but serves very well as a salad bar. THAT is marina cuisine.

Drinks? The bar is well stocked, though there only appears to be a few beers on tap. But one of them is Good Ol' Potosi, so that's fine. Any other beer or soda you want, welcome to Cansandbottlesville.

I've made a point of always reporting on the bathrooms at the places I visit. I'll

do so now but it's hardly fair to judge a marina based on the bathrooms. People are coming in from the Mississippi River, you know? It doesn't need to be pretty. It needs to be clean and it needs to not stink. The bathrooms at Mid-Town Marina, while not pretty, are clean and do not stink. The men's room at Mid-Town Marina had an additional feature. More of a curiosity, really. There's a heavy door, fairly new looking based on the hardware, painted shut. I couldn't help but at least try to open it. It didn't budge. Don't you try, either. I don't know where it would lead. I suspect to the outside. But what if it doesn't lead to the outside? Just leave well enough alone. THAT'S marina cuisine.



MID-TOWN MARINA
 285 5TH ST, EAST DUBUQUE, IL
Hours: Sun Thu: 8 AM - 9 PM;
 Fri Sat: 8 AM - 10 PM; Bar hours vary

DANNY FAIRCHILD

DANNY DOESN'T TAKE CRAP FROM NOBODY, BUT HE'LL TAKE FOOD FROM ALMOST ANYBODY. IF YOU WANT TO FIGHT DANNY, OR FEED HIM NOM-NOMS, EMAIL HIM AT [DINING@DUBUQUE365.COM](mailto:dining@dubuque365.com).

