

# Carb-loving cuisine

*WB Pizza puts crusty goodness back on the plates of local diners*

BY TERRY KIRTS

All things low-carb and Atkins-friendly have entered the culinary lexicon of local eateries. Even gourmet pizza joints are offering the only-in-America abomination of pizza toppings in a bowl. It's a relief to know that at least a few places still adhere to the simple truth Sicilians and Neapolitans have long known: A pizza is only as good as its crust.

One such purveyor of purist pizza is Will Barnes, who's proud enough of his talents to put his initials in his restaurant's name (sorry, no connection to Bugs and Daffy or the Gilmore Girls here). His strip mall pizzeria is easy to miss on the drive up Allisonville Road. But there's a strange charm to his namesake eatery, and sitting outside on a blustery spring evening while Harleys rev their engines and Neil Young serenades from outdoor speakers, you're taken back to high school drive-in days, and all seems right with the world.

**WB Pizza is only as good as its crust.**

Now and then a mini-van lets off some high schoolers after practice. Or a couple in a convertible stops for some takeout. Inside, no more than a handful of tables seat customers, and hand-drawn pictures all over the walls hearken to the more permanent graffiti of Chicago's legendary Gino's East.

Appetizers gave an indication that we'd be in good hands all evening. The "incredible" olive loaf (\$3.25) wove a layer of briny olives into two chewy demi-loaves with a golden crust. Garlic butter gilded the lily a bit but seemed appropriate on bread. Minestrone soup (\$2.50) came absent the typical beans but still packed good flavor into a rich broth with penne and hunks of celery. The chopped salad was a generous, refreshing change from most house salads. A half portion (\$2.95) filled a dinner plate with crisp greens, diced tomatoes, red onions and bell peppers. The celery seed dressing, made in house, tasted like a lighter, less cloying poppyseed dressing, a great foil to the crunchy salad.

To test out Barnes' pie-baking skills, we chose items at both ends of the pizza spectrum.

The "ultra thin crust" pizza sounded like it might cater to Atkins-ites, but it's actually a nod to diners who typically leave their crusts languishing on the plate. The result is a decidedly crisp pizza with the toppings pretty much out to the edge. The "Aegean" (\$10.75) is a straightforward specialty pizza with fresh tomato, feta cheese and basil — a perfect way to enjoy the great alchemy of dough and flavorings.

Deep-dish pizza comes two ways here: with toppings in the more orthodox sauce-meat-cheese order or the more racy inversion of cheese on the bottom and sauce on top — the way Chicagoans prefer it. The "Palermo" (\$14.40) piled on sweet Italian sausage, portabellas and sun-dried tomatoes for an extra punch of tomato flavor. Here, the crust is chewy and not overly



PHOTO BY JIM WALKER

dense without the grease that plagues many deep-dish pizzas — even those in Chicago.

In the "other" category, we chose the #3 calzone (\$6.05), stuffed with pepperoni, hot Italian sausage and onions. While the onions weren't sautéed before baking, a step that eliminates the raw bite, the sausage packed heat that paired well with sweet sauce, and the calzone wasn't so overstuffed as to gush onto the plate. This had a crust closer to that of the deep-dish pizza and a nice bit of bubbling cheese on top. Barnes had clearly passed our test.

Our waitress lit up when we asked if the desserts were homemade. Cannoli (\$5.95) promised a rare treat but delivered soggy shells with a grainy, slightly gamey filling that the menu described simply as "pastry cream." But the vanilla cheesecake (\$3.45) more than made up for this disappointment. The cake toed a delicious line between the leaden, ultra-dense versions that often pass for gourmet and the light-as-fluff ones common at church picnics. A deep-red sauce spiked with reduced Chianti made for a nice change from more typical raspberry.

WB Pizza is the kind of homey, locally-

owned restaurant that ought to become an institution. Almost nothing here comes pre-made off of a food service truck, and the knowledgeable wait staff seem quite fond of their boss. Indeed, Barnes seems to have thought of everything — from the short but fun kids menu with "my pizza" to sincere choices for vegans, fresh-brewed iced teas and a good selection of imported beers. Were one selfish, one would keep this place a secret, ensuring a patio table on a summer night. But word about good food gets around. Plan early to get your seat.

TKIRTS@NUVO.NET

## WB PIZZA

6165 ALLISONVILLE ROAD  
205-5555

MONDAY, 11-10  
WEDNESDAY-THURSDAY, 11-10  
FRIDAY-SATURDAY, 11-11  
SUNDAY, 4-10

FOOD: ★★★★★  
ATMOSPHERE: ★★★★★  
SERVICE: ★★★★★