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Paradise Cafe offers pleasures both guilty and healthful

BY JOHN KEENAN
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

To get to the sandwiches, soups and salads at the Paradise Bakery & Cafe at Village Pointe, you'll have to make your way past the pastry counter.



The turkey chipotle wrap, which includes a chipotle-raspberry cream cheese sauce, is a light, summery selection.

That might be more difficult than it sounds. Paradise display cases are filled with cinnamon rolls, muffins, brownies, cookies and other sweets. And once you've seen the double-fudge brownie, it may be hard to drag yourself to the main counter, where you'll find more healthful selections.

Taken together, the two halves of the bakery-cafe are a delicious dichotomy, a mix of tasty "good-for-you" food and desserts that, although perhaps more decadent, are no less tasty. Midlanders familiar with Panera Bread will find Paradise

When we stopped off at Paradise over Saturday lunch hour, I thought it would be impossible to find seats and would take forever to get the food. The line at the counter seemed too long, and I couldn't see an empty table.

Surprise. There's a dining area at the rear of the restaurant - take a left past the pop machines - with a

Paradise Bakery & Cafe

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lot of seating, as well as a flat-screen TV that was tuned to the Cartoon Network. It's sometimes used as a party room. So don't let the illusion of a full house run you off.

And going through the line was a breeze. You can pick up menus at the hostess stand when you enter the restaurant, but there's also an illustrated menu on the wall above the counter. The two daily specials - a turkey Reuben and a roast beef panini - were displayed on plates at the end of the counter, so you'd know what you were ordering.

If you fancy one of Paradise's 10 salads, you can watch them being assembled as you move down the line. The soup, too, is spooned directly into the bowl and handed over. But sandwich orders take a bit longer - you get a number to take to your table.

The wall menu offers a lot of choices. The sandwiches include chicken walnut salad (the local favorite), a Paradise club, albacore tuna and other options. Salad selections include Southwest chicken Caesar and chopped BBQ chicken.

The turkey Reuben (\$6.75 each) was a nice variation on the classic, Omaha-born sandwich. It featured turkey pastrami, sauerkraut, Thousand Island dressing and Swiss cheese on sourdough. The sandwich is grilled in a panini press, with butter soaking into the bread. (The breads, like the pastries, are baked fresh on the premises every day.)

Turkey pastrami is lower in fat and doesn't have the strong, salty flavor of traditional pastrami, though it's still tasty. With the dressing and its hint of chili peppers, the puckery sauerkraut and the crunch of the grilled bread, this was a nice improvisation on the Reuben.

The roast beef panini, which was a daily special, featured cheddar cheese, tomatoes, onions and a roasted garlic mayonnaise. The lean roast beef, which was tender, had a much stronger flavor than the mild turkey pastrami, so the juicy beef held its own against the cheese and garlic mayo.

Of the two, I liked the turkey pastrami sandwich better, but beef-loving Nebraskans may disagree. (A new roast beef sandwich

Where: 17305 Davenport St., Suite 101 at Village Pointe

Hours: 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. Mondays through Thursdays, 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays, 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. Sundays

Prices: \$3.35 to \$6.85

Alcohol: No

Payment: Credit cards, no checks

Wheelchair accessible: Yes

Smoking section: No

Information: 934-5757

Extras

The restaurant offers breakfast until 10 a.m. Mondays through Fridays and until 11 a.m. Saturdays and Sundays.

It has four new sandwiches this week - roast beef, egg salad, a new vegetarian and a new Southwest chicken.

The two other Omaha locations are at Regency Court and One Pacific Place.

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featuring roasted red peppers, portobello mushrooms and horseradish sauce with Havarti cheese replaced the panini this week.)

The turkey chipotle wrap (\$6.75) is roasted turkey wrapped in a chipotle-flavored tortilla with Swiss cheese, crisp lettuce and tomato and a chipotle-raspberry cream cheese sauce. Any raspberry flavor - other than a touch of sweetness - was almost undetectable under the spicy bite of the chipotle. But the chipotle flavor drew out the flavors of the turkey and veggies, making the wrap a light, summery selection.

We also tried two soups, a mild beef-bean chili (\$4.95) and a chicken noodle (\$4.95) featuring bowtie pasta in a mild chicken broth. (Half-sandwich with soup or salad combo meals are available and are a good way to sample the range of the restaurant's fare.)

The kiddie menu features Kraft macaroni and cheese (\$3.59) and a peanut butter and jelly sandwich (\$3.59), as well as turkey or ham sandwiches and grilled cheese. The kids meals come with a fresh fruit cup that includes honeydew melon.

Each sandwich and kids meal came with a warm, chip-heavy chocolate chip cookie. For some, that might have been enough dessert, but we also tried the double-fudge brownie (\$2.30), "chippers" (six for \$1.35), a cinnamon roll (\$1.99), and two muffins: banana-chocolate and raspberry (\$1.79 each).

The "chippers" are small bites of oatmeal chocolate chip cookie or fudge with white chocolate, a big favorite with the kids. The incredibly rich banana muffin featured Ghirardelli chocolate, making it taste more like a chocolate muffin with a bit of banana. The crumbly raspberry muffin was much lighter. The brownie and the cinnamon rolls were fine. Of the group, the chippers were the standout.

The cost of the meals was \$26.19, and the pastries were \$8.42. For a trip that was looking like work when we arrived at the busy restaurant, our Paradise Bakery & Cafe experience was a happy one with a sweet ending.

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