

REVIEW: JO-JO'S ORIGINAL PIZZERIA ***

Pizza's the star on diverse menu

Originally published in *The Blade* on Thursday, January 15, 2009

There are some restaurants where you linger over the menu each time you visit, scanning the endless options, wondering if you should try something new. This is not a problem at Jo-Jo's Original Pizzeria in West Toledo.

This is a place for pizza, the kind of place where loyal customers, addicted to half-price pizza offers every Monday and Wednesday night, can easily forget that there's anything else on the menu. Given the quality of the pizza, there's good reason for them not to stray.

The stuff served here is some of the best in town with a crust that is nice and thin. (Deep dish is available but stick with the original.) It can carry the dish if you leave it plain — a 14-inch cheese pizza (\$9.95) is never too greasy — but it also makes the perfect vehicle for whatever toppings you choose, and there are many. A 14-inch taco pizza (\$14.50), in particular, with seasoned ground beef, onions, lettuce, tomatoes, and sour cream, was a surprisingly good medley of texture and flavor.

Jo-Jo's, which carries the nickname of its founder, Joe Hashim, and has several other Toledo-area franchise locations, has had plenty of time to perfect its methods. The restaurant with a bar on Monroe Street near Douglas Road has been around since 1957, and, by the looks of things, so has the decor. There's nothing fancy about it. Instead, the place has the feel of a simple neighborhood hangout, from the large black and white photos on the walls to the silverware wrapped in paper napkins.

Whether or not you're ordering pizza, there is no better way to start off a starch-filled meal than with Jo-Jo's divine parmesan cheese bread (\$5.95), which manages to be slightly crispy and still melt in your mouth. There's a wide range of other bar-style appetizers consisting of fried this and that — mushrooms, mozzarella, onion petals, chicken fingers. A favorite was the spuddeese (\$4.98), a huge plate of hand-cut French fries drizzled with cheese sauce. It seemed more appropriate for a county fair than an Italian restaurant, but that didn't stop me from scraping up every last bit.

The sandwich menu offers a selection that is wide but sometimes seems haphazard. You might expect a pizzeria to have a grilled pepperoni sandwich or Italian sub, but a chicken salad sandwich or a Pa-Pa Burger topped with salsa? With variety comes the danger of overreaching.

Fortunately, the cheeseburger (\$5.50) I had for lunch one day was delicious — perfectly cooked, well-seasoned, and topped with a mountain of extras. The signature grilled-turkey sandwich (\$5.75) was good but unremarkable, and I wouldn't have minded a little more meat.

The 8-inch meatball sub (\$5.95) could have used a kick of flavor, but the stromboli (\$5.49) was excellent. It arrived piping hot, oozing with gooey cheese and a flavorful mix of ground beef inside, all the while managing to stay crusty.

As for the dinner entrees, they are basic but solid, traditional Italian fare. The dishes range from \$8.95 for spaghetti to \$13.95 for shrimp fettuccini alfredo and come with bread and a salad or other side. No surprises or nothing fancy here as pastas and meats are drenched in a zesty, homemade sauce.

The combo plate (\$12.95) provided a hearty serving of mostaccioli and a veal parmesan that was particularly savory. The cheese ravioli that completed the trio were huge, maybe too huge as they oversaturated the dish with cheese.

The wait staff was attentive and accommodating, providing plastic odds and ends to occupy the attention of an

Jo-Jo's Original Pizzeria ***

- Address: 4336 Monroe St.
- Phone: 419-473-1223.
- Category: Casual.
- Menu: Italian-American.
- Hours: 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. Monday, Wednesday, and Friday; 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Tuesday and Thursday; 4 to 11 p.m. Saturday. Reservations are not accepted on Monday and Wednesday.
- Wheelchair access: Yes.
- Average price: \$\$.
- Credit cards: AE, Dis, MC, V.

Ratings: ***** Outstanding; **** Very good; *** Good; ** Fair; * Poor.

Star ratings are based on comparisons of similar restaurants. The Blade pays for critics' meals.

infant on one occasion and digging up some rarely requested horseradish for a guest on another.

Who would have guessed at first blush that the menu at Jo-Jo's Original Pizzeria would be just as accommodating, offering up much more than one would expect from a typical Italian restaurant? Still, at its doughy core, Jo-Jo's will always be a place for pizza.

Contact Bill of fare at: fare@theblade.com

[< previous](#)

[next >](#)