

A Different Animal

Vegetarian restaurants tend to scare carnivores, but not Lovin' Spoonfuls in Tucson, which is attracting beefeaters and tree-huggers alike.

By ROBERT STIEVE

Robert Oppenheimer never opened a steakhouse. That's not unusual — scientists typically stick with science, or maybe take up fly-fishing, but they don't open restaurants. Peggy Raisglid is the exception. After working for 13 years as a chemist for Mobil Oil, she finally took the advice of friends who would come up to her after dinner parties and say things like: "Peg, your casserole was so good I licked my plate. And then I licked the plate of the woman sitting next to me. She looked at me a little funny, but I didn't care. It was incredible. You really ought to open a restaurant." And so she did.

Like Peggy, Lovin' Spoonfuls is unique, especially in a state like Arizona, which is known more for red meat and potatoes than "burgers" made of adzuki beans, zucchini, mushrooms, carrots, corn, organic oats and walnuts. Not only is her restaurant vegetarian, but it's also vegan, which means there isn't an animal or animal byproduct in sight — no eggs, no milk, no cheese, no nothing.

To an unwavering carnivore, that might sound like a recipe for disaster, but even beefeaters are embracing this popular Tucson restaurant. That's because the menu goes beyond the stereotypical list of vegetarian options — things made of seeds, twigs and pinecones. Here, everything is fresh, flavorful and filling, another stereotypical knock on vegetarian cuisine.

Of course, there are a few things on the menu that require an open mind, such as the Deluxe BLT, which is made of soy bacon strips, fresh lettuce, tomatoes and vegan mayo; the Asian Pepper Steak, which features stir-fried vegan beef with peppers and onions; and the

Golden Nuggets, an appetizer of battered soy chicken served with various vegan dipping sauces.

If you're feeling a little adventurous, you won't find a more palatable vegetarian menu. If you're more concerned with filling an open stomach than an open mind, there are plenty of safe options, as well, including soups, salads, burritos, pastas and some of the best french fries you'll ever eat. Because they're made with 100 percent canola oil in a fryer that's free of fish sticks and chunks of calamari, the natural flavor of the potato is deliciously tangible. Equally impressive is Peggy's Cashew-Mushroom Pâté, which was named one of the six best vegetarian dishes in the country by the readers of *Vegetarian Times* magazine.

In addition to the entrees and appetizers, the atmosphere at Lovin' Spoonfuls exudes a kind of healthiness. It's not hippie, like something you'd find in Flagstaff. It's minimalist and clean. Spotless. Kind of like a chemistry lab, but instead of petri dishes and test tubes there are sandwich baskets and dinner plates. What else would you expect from a scientist-turned-restaurateur?

Lovin' Spoonfuls is located at 2990 N. Campbell Avenue in Tucson. For more information, call 520-325-3765 or visit lovin Spoonfuls.com

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