

Dishing up healthy food with heart

By Valerie Saturen

If there's an unlikely profile of someone who would launch a wildly popular vegetarian restaurant in the heart of Tucson, it's got to be Peggy Raisglid, owner and creator of Lovin' Spoonfuls.

Raisglid grew up in Queens, NY, daughter of a Southern mother and Polish immigrant father who was a Holocaust survivor and escapee from the Warsaw Ghetto, worked her way through college with a stint at cooking chicken for "The Colonel," and for 13 years was a chemist for corporate giant Mobil Oil. But this background, with all of its back stories, became the quirky storm that propelled Raisglid to introduce her restaurant and the joy of vegetarian cuisine to a new wave of Tucsonans. She opened Lovin' Spoonfuls in 2005.

On any given day, you'll find Raisglid behind the counter, greeting her customers and sharing her enthusiasm for vegetarian and vegan food. Nestled inconspicuously in a strip mall on Campbell Avenue between Sauce Pizza and Wine and Opa, this Tucson treasure offers a tantalizing variety of meat-free, dairy-free, and egg-free meals.

In case you're wondering, there's nothing hippy dippy about this place. The atmosphere at Lovin' Spoonfuls is relaxed, with soft lighting, soothing natural tones, and classical music often playing in the background. With a combination of brick walls and wood paneling, the décor conjures a rustic coziness accented with touches of modern

in the past two weeks, anxious to try every dish on the menu. "The food here has so much more flavor – and it comes without the calories, fat and guilt," the woman said. Her

strips, vegan cheddar cheese, lettuce, tomato, pickles, and soy mayo. Like all sandwich baskets, this veggie burger comes with a bag of kettle-cooked potato chips, a pickle slice,

and choice of potato salad, coleslaw, or carrot salad. I went with the potato salad, which was chunky and tasty with tiny bits of pickle, onion, carrot, and green peppers. Though somewhat bland, a dash of black pepper added just the right spice for me.

The burger was delicious. In fact, it was one of the best veggie burgers I've ever tasted, and I've tasted quite a few, since they're often the only thing I can order in a restaurant. While the soy bacon strikingly captured the taste and smell of real bacon, the strips were so thin as to nearly escape notice. However, they did lend a pleasant hint of crispiness to the burger. The soy cheese was nicely melted, though neutral in taste. The whole wheat bun was fluffy and wholesome tasting.

I tried the spiced iced tea, which had a pleasantly pungent aroma but a subtler taste. The flavor hit later, though, with a delayed kick.

My companion ordered the Portobello griller (\$8.25), slices of grilled Portobello on a whole wheat hoagie bun with peppers and onions. Before I'd taken a bite of my burger and discovered its deliciousness, the tempting aroma of the mushroom wafting over from his sandwich gave me second thoughts about my order. Indeed,

Peggy Raisglid lovingly serves more than a spoonful of a delicate blend of fresh tomatoes, basil, garlic and olive oil served with warm garlic bread.



PHOTO: Jaime Richardson

favorite meal so far: "The falafel pocket with carrot salad, it's fabulous."

My Route 66 grilled burger, made in-house mainly of soy, arrived on an organic whole wheat bun, topped with soy bacon

the savory combination of ingredients brought a satisfied smile to his face. He was likewise pleased with the accompanying carrot salad.

As tasty as our entrees were, the dessert proved most memorable. We shared a banana-nut muffin (\$2.50), cake-like in texture with a hint of spice, halved and topped with caramelized strawberries. Though the muffin alone was scrumptious, delightfully crispy on top and fluffy everywhere else, the combination of muffin and strawberry was nothing short of heavenly. No crumb was left behind. And yes, for those who are not really muffin-lovers, there is chocolate at Lovin' Spoonfuls.

The dinner menu includes Pepper Steak, Green Chili Polenta, Picadilly Nut Loaf, Stroganoff Supreme, Thai Vegetable Curry, and Pasta Primavera. Breakfast offers a nice fare from a hefty stack to a Denver Scramble. Don't overlook the fresh fruit smoothies any time of day for an energy boost. And there's even a full selection of gluten-free meals.

You don't need to be a vegetarian or vegan to enjoy the food at Lovin' Spoonfuls. The place offers a pleasing reminder that there is no need to compromise taste for health. You can have your banana-nut muffin and eat it, too.

About the Author: Valerie Saturen is a freelance writer living in Tucson.

WHERE TO EAT

Lovin' Spoonfuls
2990 N. Campbell Ave.
520-325-7766
www.lovin Spoonfuls.com

Serving breakfast, lunch and dinner
Hours: Monday-Saturday 9:30am-9pm;
Sunday 10am-3pm

A range of vegan entrees, sandwiches, soups, and salads. Organic wines and beer available. Moderate prices.

Winner: Tucson Weekly 2006 and 2007 Best of Tucson Vegetarian Restaurant and Best of Tucson Veggie Burger.

Winner: Tucson Lifestyle 2007 Top Vegetarian Restaurant Culinary Award.

Named: One of nation's top 20 eateries by VegNews Magazine in 2006.