

# O'Connor's still setting the standards

Since its opening more than 15 years ago, O'Connor's Restaurant has been the setter of standards copied by many other less successful establishments trying to make a name for themselves. After a recent night out there, Liz is proud to say that O'Connor's is still easily the top dog in the dinner business.

Liz and her love hadn't been to O'Connor's in a long, long time and for a recent celebration with three other friends we headed to the old favorite on the West Boylston-Worcester town line to see how things were.

We were greeted heartily — and by name — by owner Brendan O'Connor, whose memory for names and faces is better than a Mormon genealogy bank.

It's not often you can mess with perfection and come out even better, but that's just what O'Connor's has done. Since mid-summer the entire restaurant — including the bar — has been smoke-free. Has the change made a difference in business? Not that we could tell. We showed up on a Wednesday night and waited about 10 minutes for a table. In all the dining room — and the bar — tables were full.

O'Connor's has tweaked itself all over, too. Remodeling a few years ago added a great waitress station and made the dining rooms more comfortable with new carpets and furnishings. O'Connor's historically crowded parking lot is now paved, lined and full of spaces. The menu too, has been tweaked here and there, though old favorites like Murphy's barbecued baby back ribs, remain.

On our big night, our waitress Sarah promptly took our drink order and promptly came back for our food choices. We chose an assort-



ment of specials and old favorites for appetizers and entrees. Three of us ordered the exquisite soup of the day — a butternut bisque so creamy and rich it practically induced fainting and breathless declarations of love. But we got control of ourselves in short order because we also ordered those famous Murphy's ribs and O'Connor's boneless Buffalo wings, which happen to be some of the best in the county. We were not disappointed. A thick, almost black, sweet Murphy's enhanced sauce covered the ribs, which were finger-licking good. And the wings were as spicy as ever.

Our dinner order included a fish and chips (\$10.75), a chicken bacon sandwich with mashed potatoes instead of fries (\$6.75), Chicken Soprano (\$10.95) and two specials: the New England Seafood Symphony (\$13.95) and Sea Scallops Dunmore East (\$13.95). Dinner prices topped out around \$15, including the specials.

Sarah did an excellent job clearing our big table between courses without disturbing our talk.

The fish and chips arrived piping hot and crisp and the chicken bacon sandwich was also prepared just right. Our friend who ordered the Chicken Soprano wasn't as pleased as Liz was with his dish, but maybe he was having an off night. The full plate of pasta, coated in a creamy tomato sauce and the breasts

of chicken were a wonderful comingling of flavors.

Liz was delighted by the Sea Scallops Dunmore East, a small casserole of scallops drizzled with garlic, roasted red peppers and topped with blue cheese. It came with a potato that I didn't even try to eat, there was so much tantalizing food available.

But the boyfriend was the lucky one who ordered the to-die-for New England Seafood Symphony. This collection of schrod, scallops, shrimp and salmon was coated with a lobster sauce and served with potato and vegetable. Ooh, did he have it made. Actually, we both had it made, because though the quality of the food was superb, our stomach capacity was small, so we were able to take home huge portions of our dinners and sample them again and again over the next two days.

Now that's La-la Living!

As I said, this dinner party was a celebration and it wouldn't have been a proper one without a cake. O'Connor's serves cakes and pastries made from nearby Gerardo's Italian Bakery in West Boylston, an amazing bakery right next to S&S Farms on Route 12. We chose a cake from the selection and were dutifully serenaded by a group of singing waitresses who delivered it.

The cake too, though beautiful and delicious, made it home almost intact.

Our order for a dinner for five was a miserly \$83.91 before tip, and that included four Murphy stout drafts.

O'Connor's Restaurant & Bar, 1160 West Boylston St., Worcester. 508-853-0789