

# WORCESTER

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# MAGAZINE

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**ARTS**  
& ENTERTAINMENT

**Dining Out**

## That right-at-home feeling

*O'Connor's Restaurant and Bar • 1160 West Boylston St. • 508-853-0789*

By Matt Quinn

Sometimes you wanna go where everybody knows your name; so, we headed off to O'Connor's, that particularly good version of the reliable, cozy and informal experience we enjoy in so many favorites here. A restaurant that specializes in friendly service, a novel atmosphere and hearty food, O'Connor's is, understandably, a Worcester icon.

O'Connor's crack staff, schooled in hospitality, serve up a wide range of food, but with one common denominator: Every dish is hearty and comforting. It is this charm and consistency that has drawn praise in the local, regional and national press. (O'Connor's is a perennial favorite in *Worcester Magazine's* Readers Poll — for dining, family dining and beer selection.)

My mother loves that owner Brendan O'Connor (himself, as the Irish say), cheerfully greets her by name each time she visits. I like it, too. And true to form, there he stood at the host's station waiting with a smile to seat us. A table was immediately available.

At first, O'Connor's interior over-

whelms the eyes with its endless collection of Irish articles adorning the walls, from Irish street signs to images of Irish literary figures to witty aphorisms. As they acclimate, though, the eyes begin to discern warmth, levity and quaintness.

Aside from the amusing cultural décor, the restaurant — split into three rooms, plus a bar with seating — is dressed in green, gold and wood. The seating capacity is high, but the rooms maintain an intimate feel, thanks to the low ceilings.

We looked over the beer and wine cards on the table while seated underneath a portrait of James Joyce. As O'Connor's touts one of the best beer selections in the city, and feeling the watchful eyes of Joyce, I opted for a pint of Newcastle Ale (\$3.81); My wife went with a pint of Sam Adams Octoberfest (\$3.81). Our server, Alex, brought the beer ice-cold with a small head and a fresh, hoppy flavor.

Looking to be warmed on this chilled autumn evening, we started with a cup of butternut bisque, a mug of sweetened and

pureed butternut squash. Flavors of brown sugar and nutmeg — the smells of autumn — imbued the starch.

I opted for the tossed salad with blue cheese dressing, a solid portion of red and green lettuce with julienne carrots, purple onions, grape tomatoes and croutons. Both the soup and salad came with the entrée.

In all fairness, O'Connor's is Irish in name and spirit only; the menu is vast. Every kind of meal — from Irish specialties to pasta, beef and chicken — is available. Every dish has an Irish name, however, irrespective of recipe. I couldn't resist an old favorite, Mayor Murray's Guinness Pie (\$11.50), though I swear I've been eating it at least as long as he has. This pie is a mondo, flaky-crustured casserole dish of beef stew with mushrooms, carrots and rich, stout gravy.

I grappled with the sizeable portion, giving it all I had. "I've served about ten of those tonight and you've done better than anybody," enthused Alex, to my sat-

isfaction. Even so, I had enough left over for a small lunch the next day. A side of mashed red potatoes was creamy and rich. The meal felt like the purchase of a heavy jacket, readying me to face the approaching winter.

My wife went with pecan-crustured duck (\$13.99); several slices of roast duck with a side of rice pilaf and stuffing. The pecans added a hint of sweetness to the moist meat.

Our tab before tip: \$34.77. What a bargain. At O'Connor's, you get home-style cooking and atmosphere, plus friendly service, all at bargain-basement prices. Is it innovative, daring, artful? No. But sometimes you just want to feel at home; and O'Connor's is as close as you can get.

*Matt Quinn is a pseudonym. Comments? E-mail editorial@worcestermag.com.*

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RATING	
Food	▲▲▲
Ambiance	▲▲▲ 1/2
Service	▲▲▲

### Ratings guide

- 5 Perfection
- 4 Very good
- 3 Good
- 2 Fair
- 1 Poor