

Comfort food, Taneytown style

By Father Leo Patalinghug

At the suggestion of a few emails and Facebook posts, I recently traveled to Taneytown's Gunner's Grille to visit a restaurant whose motto is "Comfort Food with a Twist" and where the chef's favorite foods are inspired by the memories of her father.

Rosemary McDermott and her guest joined me as the winners of a Catholic Review drawing to share in this unique faithful foodie experience.

The atmosphere at Gunner's Grille features a country lodge-barnyard theme, with wood from the 1800s, dimmed lighting and a fireplace with rustic charm. One dining room with a bar and TV feels and sounds like a pub – relaxing, but loud. Another area opened on certain days or for private groups gives a more peaceful setting for patrons.

The multiple dining venues – including an outdoor patio – had décor inconsistencies, but also a pretense-free, casual ambiance perfect for family-styled comfort food.

Service was very friendly, but at times inconsistent. The magnanimous personality of self-taught chef Brooke Haggerty perks up the dining experience when she meets patrons or presents the food. Her story, vision and friendly personality keep her patrons smiling and returning.

The menu offered surprising varieties – maybe too many options. High points were the daily homemade soups, such as the New England clam chowder, Maryland crab, cream of crab and chili of the week – all well-seasoned and familiarly comforting. Unique appetizers, such as goat-cheese-stuffed Peppadew Peppers and fried pickles with remoulade, give a fresh, spritely zest to the typical heavy appetizers and salad choices.

A Gunner's favorite, Oysters Taneytown, is the chef's take on Rockefeller, but substitutes braised kale for spinach. To me, the pre-frozen oysters tasted "sea salty" and the kale was chewy, but the guests enjoy the dish very much.

The multiple entrees kept the theme of comfort foods, but I was looking for the "twist." Familiar chicken dishes, pork chops, steaks and seafood including catfish and salmon are prepared well and reasonably priced. The Gunner's meatloaf muffin had the most tantalizing description: ground beef, bison and turkey wrapped in smoky bacon. But it was a bit dry for my expectations of gooey-moist goodness and the gravy on both the potatoes and meat muffin overpowered the natural flavors of the meatloaf. The grilled asparagus gave a helpful flavor of char, along with garlicky smashed potatoes.

The menu includes dessert options from a Glen Burnie bakery, plus a few homemade

options such as a cookie bowl, brownies and ice cream. A typical kid's menu makes it family friendly.

The chef-owner has a great vision, perhaps a grand vision, for more sophisticated homey flavors in a small town, making it a destination restaurant. The large menu may prevent perfecting the technique of some of the popular menu items, but the price points are so reasonable, it's hard not to come here for good ol'-fashioned, family-friendly comfort food.

More attention to consistent service, precision in food preparation and perhaps scaling back the menu may give Gunner's Grille more culinary focus to highlight that "comfort-food-twist" that fills the chef with contagious joy in her work.

When we think of all we go through in life, it's good to have big dreams and vision, but also a willingness to focus on the details according to our life's motto. Gunner's Grille and my fantastic dinner partners helped me to see, once again, the blessing of sharing comfort food with good people - with or without the "twist."



Have an idea for a future Culinary Confession? Send email to FrLeo@CatholicReview.org.

Also see:

Woodberry kitchen offers farm-to-table excellence

[Gourmet goodness in Catonsville](#)

[Bay Leaf is a spice bite](#)

[Wit and Wisdom offers hearthside charm](#)

[Vegetarian meals are for more than Lenten Fridays](#)

[Millersville restaurant shows conversion is ongoing](#)

[Amicci's: Friendly to customers and pocketbook](#)

[Holy smokin' good barbecue](#)

[Baltimore's crabbiest and 'best' crabcakes](#)

[This Cinco de Mayo celebrate simple and authentic truths](#)

Copyright (c) June 15, 2013 CatholicReview.org