

Meet Me In St. Louis

Michael's Pizzeria brings St. Louis-style pies to the Upstate

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Sometimes I'm in the mood for a loud, bustling place, a place where lines stretch from the counter and folks sit huddled next to each other, filling every seat that could be squeezed into the premises. There's a place for quiet, elegant meals, and just as surely,

there's a place for raucous, noisy meals at restaurants where you can watch the cooks while they work (and *keep on working*). There's a fever at restaurants like that, an energy, and the one thing you can say for them is that regardless of what it is they serve, people truly like something about them. Otherwise, they wouldn't be so darn crowded.

Michael's Pizzeria in Easley is just such a restaurant on a Friday night. Throngs filed in throughout my hour inside the place, some to pick up to-go orders, others sitting down to eat on-site. Tables were scarce. I was happy to get mine, but had to lurk a minute after placing my order, circling the other diners in a hapless vulture routine. Finally, someone had the good sense to get up and give me a chance to eat. I think it had become obvious that I wasn't going anywhere. There's a small cluster of high tables right around the ordering area, then a separate room with several more. But there's not quite enough to seat all the folks that would like to be eating here, at least not on weekend nights (or at least not on the weekend night I stopped by).

There's a reason for all the hubbub: the food. Michael's isn't aiming to be anything more than a prime destination for comfort food like pizza, hoagies and

wings, and by maintaining focus on the things it does well, the restaurant manages to give us what we want in a more unique package than the chains do. There's beer on tap here, too, and even though it's not dark inside and the décor doesn't evoke the '70s, the place still feels like an old-fashioned pizza parlor.

Pizza, of course, isn't the only thing

vored cheese that is almost creamy in texture. Whether you like it or you don't (and I did), it's unlike any you've tried before. Large, fresh ingredients are also a hallmark of the style, and I was particularly impressed with the robust, paper-thin slices of Italian sausage and the tangy sauce on mine. Even if you don't like thin crust, you have to admire the crunch you get when eating these pies.

If all Michael's had to offer was its strangely distinctive St. Louis pizza, it would still be worth a visit. But I was also happily surprised by the Italian hoagie thick bread that came with slices of pepperoni, salami, ham, provolone cheese, mayonnaise, lettuce and tomato. For 10 cents per item, you can also pack on onions; mustard; pickles; oil and vinegar; oregano; black olives; and green, banana and jalapeno peppers. It's a hearty sub that means to fill up the stomach and does so. Meanwhile, the restaurant's french fries (\$1 with a sandwich) are as good as any I've had in recent weeks. They're fresh, thick, salty and cooked until purely gold.

The only part of my meal at Michael's that didn't quite rise above was a plate of grilled chicken salad (\$5.25) that featured good enough ingredients of assorted greenery, peppers, black olives, onions, tomato and mozzarella, but that slipped with the inclusion of packaged dressing and chicken slices that gave the impression of being pre-cooked and then heated up rather than freshly grilled. Still, salads occupy just a small corner of the menu, and I suspect that the crowds who come here aren't terribly worried about the green stuff.

At Michael's Pizzeria, there's plenty to buzz about and plenty of people who are willing to do the buzzing. It may not be quiet and it may not be elegant, but it's tasty, and that's enough. Next time you want pizza, meet me in St. Louis.

Michael's Pizzeria
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photo: Melissa Anderson

THE THIN CRUST MAN: Sample the house specialty — St. Louis-style pizza, or any one of the other style of pies, sandwiches and Italian dishes at Michael's Pizzeria in Easley.

on the menu. There's also lasagna, spaghetti, stromboli, calzones, subs, wings and more, leading a long list of meal options. Still, the vast majority of the folks hovering around the front door are doing so because they're waiting to pick up big white boxes of pizza.

Most of us are familiar with huge-sliced, chewy-crust New York-style pizza and deep-dish, breaded Chicago-style pizza, but I had never encountered St. Louis-style pizza before stepping foot in Michael's. Being a thin-crust aficionado, I'm glad I had the chance. St. Louis pizza features cracker-thin crust and substitutes either provolone or romano cheese for mozzarella. The menu at Michael's tells us that the cheese used on the pizza is "imported from St. Louis" and that the restaurant "cannot be held responsible for any addiction to this product!" This version (\$6.25 for a 10" pizza, \$10.25 for 14" and \$14.25 for 18") is sliced in oblong squares and contains powerfully fla-