

Good Eats in Kirksville

BY ANNA MEIER
Food Review

In Kirksville, you can get hot soup and cold salad from a chilled-out coffee shop, or chips and salsa from one of the many Mexican restaurants around town. Certainly, Kirksville has very few restaurants compared to most other college towns, but what it does have is better than Truman students often give it credit for.

Washington Street Java Co. is a staple of the Kirksville area. It's modern and fresh, always smells of roasting coffee beans and baking bread and it's certainly a nice change from the Mexican restaurants and Chinese joints in town.

Among the four Mexican restaurants to choose from, there are two newer ones, The Happy Mexican and El Agave Azul. Students can now think about their choices before they automatically head to La Pachanga.

Java Co., nestled between two novelty shops on the Kirksville Square, consistently offers good food that is also healthy. The restaurant and coffeehouse has a fairly extensive menu ranging from candy bar lattes to quiche.

Barista and waitress Deanna Kennedy has worked at Java Co. for a little more than three years now and said she loves the food and beverages.

"For me ... one of the perks about working here is you can make

your drinks up, usually do something like a chai coffee with two shots and some cinnamon packed with the shot and soy milk with a little bit of vanilla in there," Kennedy said. "It's a really good flavor."

Although their drink menu dwarfs the selection of food, there is still a lot to choose from and it's pretty hard to go wrong in the way of a meal or confections. Some of Kennedy's favorite food items are the tomato-lentil soup and the chicken salad.

The tomato-lentil soup is a tomato-based stock with lentils and a truckload of vegetables, like celery, onions and carrots. Although its flavor is extremely savory and satisfying, it was a little on the cool side and is definitely meant to be eaten right away. The chicken salad makes up for any lack of heat in the soup, and consists of shredded chicken, cranberries, red onions and almonds. It is a must-eat, as is the chocolate toffee cake they serve as a dessert option. It is rich but also light and fluffy, with a cream cheese frosting and what tasted like Heath bar sprinkled on top.

"We make people laugh, and we're happy. We're not the typical Mexican restaurant."

Jesse Gonzalez
Host and Server

"I think it's just the atmosphere — everyone here loves their job," Kennedy said as to why Java Co. stands out among Kirksville restaurants. "They're really friendly, they love to help customers and we're either interested in coffee or tea. If they don't drink the coffee, then they love the tea. You can tell that people want to help other people when you come in, and that's what's kept me here for three years."

El Agave Azul is located on Baltimore street where the Country Kitchen used to be. "We have a very clean place, and it's roomy and we try to make everybody happy here," manager Alfred Garcia said. The restaurant opened March 25 and also has a very large menu. They seem to have a little bit more upscale food than the typical Kirksville Mexican meal, and their chimichanga is a pretty tasty choice.

A warning to the onion and pepper hater: The menu only alludes to chicken or beef in the fried burrito, but there is also a mixture of fajita vegetables lurking in the middle. The guacamole tasted fresh and was a nice complement to the pico de gallo in the chimichanga mix. Their beans also had a nice smoky flavor and went well with the white cheese sauce drenching the chimichanga.

The Happy Mexican is in the old haunt of El Vaquero on north Baltimore street. Open since June 22, the little place seems to be doing quite well for itself, and there's no denying that the mural walls and brightly painted chairs make you feel happy.

"We're different, we are more authentic than they are, we speak English," host and server Jesse Gonzalez said. "We make people laugh, and we're happy. We're not the typical Mexican restaurant."

Along with the atmosphere, the food will make mouths of all kinds happy, too. The white queso dip is a delectable medley of melted cheese albeit a little runny for dipping chips. The spinach quesadilla is loaded with more spinach than is necessarily pleasant in a tortilla, but the enchiladas and veggie quesadilla both are good choices with a good balance of cheese and other fillings. The salsa is hot, but fresh and full of herbaceous flavors, making it one of those places where the eater is full by the time the meal even makes it to the table — always a good thing.

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