

CHERI'S CAFE

A sweet spot for baked goods and traditional fare

“Be who you are and say what you feel,” reads a dusty chalkboard at Cheri’s. “Because those who mind don’t matter and those who matter don’t mind.”

At the long-running Cannon Beach cafe, both permutations are integral: Cheri’s is a local haunt, and the eponymous owner treats all-comers with a brash, no-nonsense spunk. For those who are sure of themselves, who can do without excessive glad-handing or false cheer, the cafe can be cozy, comfortable and, yes, considerate.

My first trip came on a dismal, rainy Friday evening. Cannon Beach was empty,

and the cafe appeared that way too. But as I made my way through the vacant front dining room to the back bar I found a warm, lively salon. Local so-and-sos gathered around tables over spirits, gossip and the day’s politics. Couples tucked into booths, and a guitarist picked and sang smooth, unobtrusive but buoying ragtime and blues standards. Besides the “shingle museum” lining the walls, there’s a lot of wood, rows of deep, pocketed skylights, a well-hidden video slot cove, a diner-style bar and a clean, lived-in feel that’s intimate and

un-cramped.

Cheri, who runs the front of the house, was curt at first. It took a bit of cajoling to get her to highlight the standout dishes. A bashful, less steadfast customer might not have gotten it out of her. (Many of them, however, freely unload in online reviews after some perceived slight.)

Noting the hand-pressed patty, Cheri called her’s the “best burger in town.” And while I’ve yet to try them all, Cheri’s certainly deserves to be in the conversation. While there’s no signature flourish to Cheri’s thick burger — it’s minimally seasoned, with familiar accoutrements — the hand-pressed patties are so far superior to their frozen, pre-made, runty siblings. The bun was lightly toasted, the roughage crisp

and rightly portioned.

Cheri’s burger (\$8.50 with cheese) was also offered in a way I wish were more common: a la carte. Should you want fries you can pay \$2 more for them. A side salad, however, wasn’t among the up-charge options, so I paid \$4.95 for one outright. For a bowl of lettuce, croutons and sesame seeds — with a few errant shreds of cabbage and carrot — it was entirely too much. Akin to a bowl of crispy water and seeds, it was more neutral than nutritious.

Cheri also spoke fondly of the fish and chips. I had the Pacific Cod (\$15.95). The four beer-battered, golden-brown chunks of fish easily outweighed the fries. The crust was light, even, not too greasy.

From the hot sandwiches, the Turkey Club (\$10.95), on lightly toasted oat nut bread, was precisely assembled, but the ratios were off. It featured as many (thin) slices of turkey as it did bread.

The pizza too was quite bread-y, but more purposefully. Though I wouldn’t quite call it “deep dish,” the crust on Cheri’s pizzas approaches the upper end of the spectrum. The sauce is sweet and there isn’t



The cinnamon rolls are gooey, buttery, spongy and full of brown sugar and cinnamon.

The pizza abounds with crust and mozzarella; the Mouth would have liked more sauce.



enough of it. Conversely, melty mozzarella abounds. At \$15 for a 12-inch pie, Cheri’s pizzas are quite a deal, easily filling two, maybe three people. At about twice that cost for a 16-inch pizza, doubling up on the smaller pies seems to me a better value. Also, slices are available starting at noon.

But times can be a bit fungible at Cheri’s. While there are no posted hours, she says they’re open 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. every day (and closed on Sundays and Thursdays). I showed up around 5:45 p.m. on a Saturday and found the lights off and the doors locked.

I returned on a weekday afternoon for coffee and pastries. While a little less lively than the Friday salon, a warm, easy vibe persisted. A long-running customer fawned, pointing me toward the cinnamon roll, and I understood why. Served on saucer-sized plate about its own circumference, the roll was gooey, buttery, spongy, full of brown sugar and cinnamon, and topped with a frosting that smacked of a nutty, almond finish. (The cinnamon rolls are also used in the bread pudding.) The chocolate chip cookie was firm, chewy, and with the subtle, requisite salty counterpoint. The pastry case is filled out with bagels, scones, coffee cakes and more.

Indeed, baked goods are Cheri’s sweet-spot. The current restaurant began in 1985 as The Cookie Store. Decades later it expanded into the full-scale cafe. Since that expansion, I’m told the menu has mostly stood pat, which certainly seems to be the case — this is traditional fare. And, like Cheri herself, it’s not changing for anyone.

mouth OF THE COLUMBIA

COAST WEEKEND’S LOCAL RESTAURANT REVIEW

Story and photos by THE MOUTH OF THE COLUMBIA • mouth@coastweekend.com

Cheri’s Cafe

Rating: ★★☆☆

239 N. Hemlock St., Cannon Beach
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HOURS: 8 a.m. to 7 p.m.; closed Thursday and Sunday.

PRICE: \$ – Entrées mostly hover around \$10.

SERVICE: Curt, quirky and prompt.

VEGETARIAN / VEGAN OPTIONS: A few options, but hardly a vegetarian destination.

DRINKS: Full bar, coffee and espresso.

KEY TO RATINGS

- ★ poor
- ★★ below average
- ★★★ good & worth returning
- ★★★★ excellent
- ★★★★★ outstanding, the best in the Columbia-Pacific region