

MOUTH OF THE COLUMBIA

Coast Weekend's local
restaurant review

Old-fashioned pizza parlor parked in the past

Review and photos by
MOUTH OF
THE COLUMBIA

The menu confirms what a quick look around BJ's Pizza Palace suggests: The Seaside restaurant and sports bar was established in 1970. Indeed, BJ's is funky and warm, dressed mostly in its original clothes.

The building's exterior is particularly odd, walls jutting in and out, suggesting multiple additions over the years. Just past the bridge on the north end of Seaside, at the mouth to Gearhart, most of the windows are in the rear, overlooking Neawanna Creek.

The restaurant side is puzzlingly segmented into five disparate dining spaces. They lack any flow or logic. Some seem forgotten and a bit lonely. The high-ceilinged banquet room, dubbed the "party zone," escapes these trappings. It is bright, open and spacious, and it took me back to the post-game pizza parties of Little League.

On my trips, however, the restaurant side was like a ghost town, almost spookily quiet. The bar, while not bustling, showed signs of life. With west-facing windows, natural light and placid views of the water, it was soft and easy. With a number of TVs and the full menu available, I've found it a fine place to watch football.

I was joined by four friends who were ready to nosh after a business meeting. I asked the server what she liked, and she pointed toward the pizza and the chicken. "That's all I eat here," she said. I went for both and added the daily special: barbecue ribs.

While waiting for our food, an enticing smell filled



The broasted chicken was succulent.

the air: the chicken, which was being broasted. The 20-odd-minute process — pressure frying — is becoming rarer, but those who are familiar swear by it, touting meat that's much juicier and less greasy. And with what we got on the eight-piece platter (\$15), I must join the converted. The crunchy, peppery skin popped to reveal succulent white and dark meat.

In a world of modernizing techniques and palates, broasting offers a vintage value and appeal. If someone got a broaster into a food cart, chicken like this could compete in the trendy pods of Portland. At BJ's it may be overlooked but shouldn't be — at least for fans of fried birds. You can get it different ways: buckets (which are a la carte platters), with fries and, amazingly/puzzlingly, with spaghetti (say goodnight — it's nap time!). Sadly though, waffles are nowhere to be found.

There was nothing rare about the pizza, but I enjoyed it just the same. BJ's is thin crust that is not insubstantial. Toppings run right to the edge — there's no fluffy, doughy



The hamburger's hand-pressed patty was seasoned but on the salty side.

ridge — and slices are crisp throughout. Heavy with the cheese, light on sauce, the 13-inch medium felt big enough to feed three. At the server's suggestion we tried the BJ's Special (\$16.65 / medium), which featured pepperoni, Canadian bacon, beef and tomatoes. It, like most every pie at BJ's, offered familiar flavors. Again I was reminded of the post-game Little League parties. To wit: This is an old-fashioned, American pizza parlor — not some modern boutique offering figs



The half-rack barbecue ribs special was a whole lot of sweet, fatty, finger-licking food.

burger (\$7.25) and appreciated that the hand-pressed patty was seasoned, even if it was on the salty side. Cooked nearly well-done, it was accompanied by a choice of fries, tots or jo-jos. It was a fine, mid-sized, drive-in style burger but lacked that special something that makes it essential — either value (say a happy-hour price) or flavor.

Much of the rest of the menu fit BJ's '70s style. The majority of it was fried, heavy and meat-y. I was tempted by the Philly and the French Dip, which featured prime rib, likely the leftovers from the Saturday special. But instead I opted for the outlier, a gluten-free pizza crust, perhaps the only addition to BJ's menu during this century.

I went with the Garlic Chicken (\$12.50 / small, plus \$2 for gluten free), another of the server's recommendations. For my taste, there wasn't enough of the garlic sauce against the pungent olives and

BJ'S PIZZA PALACE

Rating: ★★

2490 U.S. Highway
101, Seaside

503-738-7763

HOURS: 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday to Friday and 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Saturday and Sunday.

PRICE: \$ — Entrées hover around \$10; pizzas are a good value.

SERVICE: Knows the regulars by name.

VEGETARIAN / VEG-AN: A meatless pizza is probably the only worthwhile vegetarian dish.

DRINKS: Full bar, soda, coffee and tea.

KEY TO STAR RATING SYSTEM

- ★ Poor
- ★★ Below average
- ★★★ Good
- ★★★★ Excellent
- ★★★★★ Best in region

tomatoes. But anyway, this was about the crust, which I found ... just O.K. Of the few gluten-free pizza crusts I've tried in recent months, this was probably the most successful, the least rubbery, though still on the chewy side. The technology for gluten-free crusts is improving but has yet to fully arrive — at least on the North Coast.

Of course, BJ's isn't about the future. It's parked firmly in the past, with salad bar and the sneeze guard to prove it. If you can get past the warm, rough decor, the pizza is robust, and the broasted chicken a forgotten classic.