

MOUTH OF THE COLUMBIA

Coast Weekend's local
restaurant review

Nehalem sports bar is a beacon for hungry night owls

Review and photos by
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It was after midnight. A friend and I had been working feverishly on a project in South County and neglected to eat. We were starving when we wrapped, but our options were practically nonexistent. We weren't being picky, we just needed something — anything. But just about everything south of Seaside was closed — not even a gas station or grocery store was open, much less a restaurant. We made a frenzied call to Manzanita Lighthouse Pub & Grub, and they picked up. We raced there to beat last call — or, rather, a closed kitchen.

We arrived to find a handful of folks gathered around a stage taking turns singing karaoke. We ordered pizza, much more than we needed, feeling ever-so-lucky that we'd hit our respective pillows with food in our stomachs.

Over the next few weeks, I visited the Lighthouse again. On U.S. Highway 101 between Manzanita and Nehalem, it's a weird, cavernous place, deep, dark and long, lit by buzzing neon beer signs and glowing TVs. The capacity seems to outstrip demand, which can feel a little lonely, but on the other hand it offers multiple pockets where you can post up with your party and have space to yourself. Past the stage area, which is ringed by long, tall tables, there's ping pong, a couple of pool tables, pinball and a non-operating second bar. Booths run nearly the length of the place — nearly 10 of them. The main bar is dug in, a few feet below the main floor, which leaves patrons towering over the bartenders. It's odd. So is the unfinished plywood ceiling, full of ramps and bulging edges. If you flipped it over and removed the spiderwebs of light and electrical

cables it'd make a great skateboard park.

So yeah, the vibe is quirky, scruffy, a little rough around the edges. The Lighthouse is part dive, part sports bar and two or three times bigger than it needs to be. But again, better big than small. The menu is as one might expect in a place full of national beer branding — bar food and fried appetizers. My server highlighted a few areas: "Our burgers are hand-pressed, and the beef is never frozen. We make the dough for our pizza and calzones here, and we do our own pulled pork."

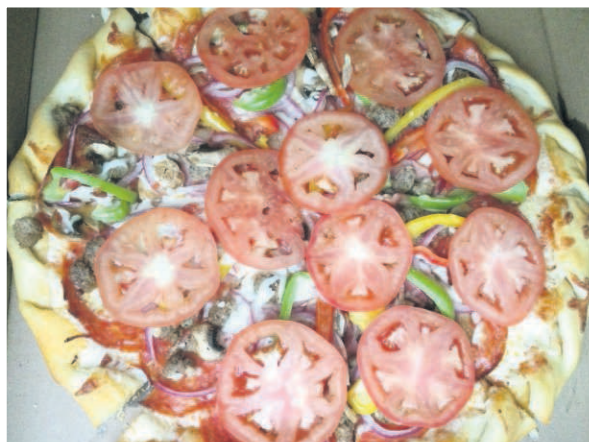
Pondering the logistics of never-frozen beef, I went with the El Diablo burger (\$10.95). I ordered it medium-rare, and it arrived absolutely so. With a steak knife stuck through the center to hold things together, it was burly. It was also extraordinarily messy. After most every bite, I had to reassemble the thing, shoeing layers back into place. Dripping with juice, the bun soaked quickly. Halfway through, my fingers were puncturing the thing, poking at the patty. But dang if I wasn't enjoying it. The bacon was salty and plentiful, the bulging patty nice and pink in the center, topped with snappy pepper jack, melted over jalapeños. It had a peppery but not overwhelming kick. (If there was habanero, as the menu mentioned, I missed it — and you don't often overlook habanero.) Tearing through a small forest of napkins, I was happy I got the chipotle molasses on the side — it was much too sweet.

Satisfied as I was with the



Above: The Pulled Pork Sandwich, served on a roll, was sloppy and a bit sweet.

Left: The pizzas at Manzanita Lighthouse Pub & Grub feature old-school flavors, but the Mouth preferred the calzones for flavor and value.



burger, the accompanying salad was a wreck. Topping it with shredded cheddar cheese defeated the point — not that the underlying watery lettuce and black olives had much to offer either. I wasn't too surprised, though. The Lighthouse is the kind of place a deep-fried pickle might count as a veggie.

I also tried the Pulled Pork Sandwich (\$8.95). It came on a hoagie — or was it a hot dog? — roll. Loads of glistening meat spilled over the lightly toasted edges, streaking the plate with grease. It was slurp-y, succulent, sloppy and sweet — a little too much for my taste. That sugary, syrupy-ness could've been offset with something fresh, like slaw, or briny, like pickles. And indeed, the two tiny slices of

pickles-as-garnish added integral balance when I stuck them in the sandwich. I almost thought about ordering more — the pickles made a big difference. And, having learned my lesson with the salad, I opted for onion rings. They were big, like cross-sections of a softball, crunchy and obvious.

On this afternoon the bar was rather full. The University of Oregon Ducks were playing their season opener. The long tables were filled with groups of men, in baseball caps and flip flops, cheering along, ordering pitchers. I looked longingly at the golden, football-sized calzones, which I would return for, and which didn't disappoint.

I had the Combination Calzone, a display of pork's versatility. Inside the golden-brown, soft, flaky dough pillow were layers of pepperoni, sweet Canadian bacon, bacon, herbed balls of Italian sausage, plus a few bell peppers, mushrooms, onions

MANZANITA LIGHTHOUSE PUB & GRUB

Rating: ★ ★ ★

**36480 N. Hwy 101,
Nehalem**

PHONE: 503-368-4990

HOURS: 2 to 11:30 p.m.

Sunday to Thursday; 2 p.m. to 1:30 a.m. Friday; and noon to 1:30 a.m. Saturday. 21 and older only.

PRICE: \$ — Most entrées around \$10 or less.

SERVICE: Chill, familiar with the locals

VEGETARIAN / VEGAN OPTIONS: Vegetarians will get by in a pinch.

DRINKS: Coffee, soda, full bar.

KEY TO STAR RATING SYSTEM

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

and tomatoes. There was but a dash of marinara, and I could've gone for more veggies, but still: The calzone was hot, easy and comforting — the kind of thing you want to wrap yourself up in and take a nap. It was also a great deal of food for \$10.95. (And also fairly greasy.)

The Lighthouse's pizzas worked too. The medium crust was light and soft, almost underdone. Meat again ruled the day — these are old-school, parlor flavors: pepperoni, Hawaiian, chicken-bacon-ranch, combination and so on. They're reasonably priced, and sized, but for my money the calzones outshine them in both flavor and value.

Plus you can get them late.