

MOUTH OF THE COLUMBIA

Coast Weekend's local
restaurant review

Downtown Seaside pub and grill offers a tad of whimsy

Review and photos by
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It was novelty that first drew me in to Seaside's Big Kahuna Pub and Grill. More specifically: a photograph of a Bloody Mary with a bacon cheese burger on top. I stepped into the darkened, loosely island-themed, shoebox-sized restaurant and asked the bartender: "Is this for real?" "It sure is," she said. "Well I've got to have one," I said.

As she got to work, we got to talking. It turned out she owns the little hole-in-the-wall, which is tucked in at the end of an alcove near the beach on Broadway. Her name is Jill Harling, and she also owns Bebop Burgers, which shares a wall and partial menu with Big Kahuna. While the sister-businesses have been around a quarter-century, Jill took over in 2014 after moving to the North Coast from Alaska. Jill was sharp, hospitable and personable — qualities in somewhat rare supply on Broadway's oft-faceless, churning and transient tourist funnel.

Jill created the teeming, Finish Line Bloody Mary — what I came in for — when she first heard about Hood to Coast, a relay race where teams start at Mt. Hood and finish on the beach in Seaside. The drink seemed appropriate — hearty, gluttonous and a little bit deranged. Besides the crowning burger, the drink came garnished with plenty more — two shrimp, a pepperoni stick, celery, stuffed olives, a wand of pickled asparagus, a pepperoncini, lemon, lime, and probably something else I'm forgetting. Oh, right — it comes with a side of fries too. Sadly, though, my Hood to Coast Bloody Mary wasn't earned quite as envisioned.

I began to snicker as Jill stacked accoutrement after accoutrement. I laughed out loud as the towering cocktail neared completion, and again as it was delivered to my table. I reveled in the joyous absurdity.

Made spicy, the drink had a

reasonable snap. I particularly enjoyed the rim — beyond salt there was pepper, spices and seeds. The house-made mix was right down the middle — neither limp nor wicked strong. Just fine.

Now: the garnishes. There's no reason to describe most of them — dipped momentarily in a vodka-tomato juice mix we can all fathom celery, a cured pepperoni stick, olives, and so on. The shrimp were a tad dry and wanting, but a fine source of lean protein. The burger was strikingly familiar. If you've been to Wendy's you know what I mean. Think: Junior Bacon Cheeseburger and you're nine-tenths of the way there. I did a double-take — if not for the round patty I might've begun an investigation.

Nonetheless, the Finish Line Bloody Mary was a good time — plus it made a surprisingly substantial, if irresponsible, lunch. (For those less hungry or playful, Big Kahuna offers a version without the burger and fries.) However, my trail of giggles were muted a bit when I received the \$21 bill. Novelty, it turns out, can cost you.

On subsequent trips I was curious where the cocktail-capping burger fit in on the Big Kahuna/Bebop spectrum. It seemed of a junior or child-sized variety. From the full-grown options I tried the Swiss Melt, which was bigger, but not wholly man-sized. At \$7.50 and served a la carte I felt like I'd payed a few dollars too many. Besides the grilled onions being cut so fine, practically shredded, the rest of it was familiar, swerving toward the fast food.

I was thankful the BBQ Pork Sandwich (\$9.95) wasn't drenched in corn-syrupy sugars, though neither the portion nor the flavor left me reeling. Neither did the Hawaiian Teriyaki Chicken & Rice (\$9.95) plate, from the menu's truncated, seemingly forgotten "Taste of Hawaii" section. The veggies were steamed to oblivion. But hey, again, it wasn't propped



Above: The Finish Line Bloody Mary comes with shrimp, a pepperoni stick, celery, stuffed olives, a wand of pickled asparagus, a pepperoncini, lemon, lime, a bacon cheeseburger and a side of fries.

Right: Though the BBQ Pork Sandwich wasn't drenched in corn-syrupy sugars, the portion and the flavor didn't wow the Mouth.



up with sugars. I also tried the Cod Fish & Chips (\$10.95). The neatly uniform size of the beer-battered fillets told me just about everything I needed to know.

With a few visits under my belt I missed that initial glee of the stacked Bloody Mary. So, I did what anyone would in this case: ordered a jello shot and one in a syringe. The jello shots (\$1) made with vodka smacked of rubbing alcohol, though I quite enjoyed the

spicy, tequila-based lime flavors (aka green).

When the syringe was delivered, the neighboring table perked up. They were a group of three, all sipping bright, mid-afternoon cocktails and beginning to guffaw. It was a ladies-only weekend, I learned, as they began befriending everyone within earshot. They cackled at my jello-syringe. "It's like a cold worm wiggling into your mouth!" said one of the

BIG KAHUNA PUB AND GRILL

Rating: ★★½

111 Broadway, Seaside

PHONE: 503-738-3271

HOURS: 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily

PRICE: \$ — Most entrées hover around \$10

VEGETARIAN / VEGAN OPTIONS: Not recommended

SERVICE: Cheery, fun

DRINKS: Full bar (families welcome)

KEY TO STAR RATING SYSTEM

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

jello-syringe experienced before I had a chance to squeeze the plunger. She was right on. The group ordered a round of syringes for themselves. And then another round of cocktails, including one that came in a bucket. Increasingly boisterous, they laughed, gasped, confessed and prodded, two-and-a-half-sheets into the wind. I thought to myself: While the food at Big Kahuna may not be a worthwhile draw, whimsy could be.