

## **Boston Sunday Globe Dining Out – December 8, 2002**

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People sometimes ask why I would review a restaurant that doesn't need the business, and my response is always the same – it's a disservice to ignore a place just because it's popular. New people move to the area who may not be familiar with the restaurant, a new chef may have been hired, the menu and prices could have changed - there are many factors.

O'Hara's opened in May 1985 and is run by Curt O'Hara and his sons, John and Karl. It is clearly a busy place, and a good spot for reasonably priced food in a relaxed, casual atmosphere. You can leave your culinary dictionary at home - haute cuisine it is not. You won't find any dishes made with truffles (neither the fungi or the chocolates); there is no crystal on the table or Cristal on the wine list; and if there is a beggar's purse to be found, it's under a pauper's arm. The menu offers a variety of pub appetizer, salads, sandwiches and burgers, good pizza and calzones, and changing nightly specials.

The white walls are adorned with a hodgepodge - everything from antique photos, mirrors, and beer signs to a framed Ryder Cup flag and a "Help Wanted: No Irish Need Apply" plaque. A horseshoe shaped bar separates the two dining areas, and if the wait for a table is long and you don't mind cigarette smoke and noise, you can eat there. There are a couple of TVs around the bar, too, if you want to watch a game. The atmosphere is even warmer and more inviting now with the holiday wreaths and green garlands, the entire place aglow from the pretty white Christmas lights.

Boneless buffalo wings (\$5.95), the ubiquitous bar food, were better than average. The menu says they are "hot", but we thought the sauce was just right, especially with the creamy blue cheese dressing. The nachos (\$5.95) were just OK. Topped with cheese, lettuce, and diced tomatoes, the round tortilla chips were of the supermarket variety, but they were fine after being "doctored up" with the sides of decent guacamole, jalapenos, sour cream, and salsa.

The stuffed flank steak au jus (\$10.50) exceeded our expectations. The juicy beef was neatly rolled around a blend of melted cheese, fresh peppers, mushrooms, onions, and spinach. The side of mashed potatoes was a nice accompaniment.

We highly recommend the tasty chicken molise (\$9.50). The dish has sautéed chicken tenderloins mixed with garlic, broccoli florets, sour cream, tomatoes, and your choice of pasta; we opted for penne. There was enough of this entree to serve as the next day's lunch.

The ravioli primavera (\$8.95) is another good choice. Six delicate cheese ravioli are tossed with a medley of zucchini, summer squash, tomatoes, mushrooms, and broccoli, sautéed in olive oil and garlic.

Pizzas range from \$7.95 for basic cheese to \$12.95 for more involved versions like the tango pizza, with broiled marinated chicken, roasted red peppers, chopped tomatoes, mozzarella and Romano cheeses, and virgin olive oil. You can also create your own pizza or calzone from a lengthy list of fresh toppings.

There is a nice selection of seafood items, too. The San Francisco Cioppino (\$12.95) has sautéed mussels, calamari, and shrimp with your choice of oil and garlic or marinara sauce over pasta. The baked stuffed haddock (\$12.95) was light and flaky the moist fish topped with a savory cracker stuffing.

The wait for a table can be lengthy, and jockeying for seats at the bar can be annoying, especially when some patrons seem to sit for hours, making a meal out of Guinness and free snack mix. But the food is consistently good, the staff is very pleasant, and there's something for everyone on the menu.