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FOOD

BY TODD SOUTH



Los Altos is a family diner with four pages of breakfast items and other standards.
PHOTO/ALLISON YOUNG

Gold standard

Los Altos is a pretty standard family diner with four pages of breakfast items (available all day) and a collection of appetizers, sandwiches, wraps, burgers, salads, dinner plates and desserts, as well as a kid's menu. It covers all the bases, and thus the family and I headed to the hinterlands of northern Sparks for an evening meal.

An appetizer of beer battered pickles was a bit of a surprise (\$7.95), as dill pickle spears were used in lieu of the more common sliced pickle "chips." The batter was quite good—crispy, not oily—but it's wise to wait a bit before biting in. That was one nuclear hot cucumber. A basket of chicken strips with fries (\$9.95) was my grandson's choice, and the breaded tenderloins were about average. The fries were slightly battered, very crispy and well seasoned. The strips were best with ranch dressing, but the fries didn't need it.

My daughter's plate of nachos (\$8.95, plus \$2 for chicken and \$3.50 for a side of guacamole) was the usual pile of tortilla chips cemented together by jack and cheddar cheeses, topped with grilled chicken, refried black beans, pico de gallo, sour cream and salsa. I'm not really a fan, because it's nearly impossible to pull these apart and get a decent mix on each chip. She seemed perfectly happy with it. The guac had a fair amount of lime and cilantro and tasted very fresh.

My daughter-in-law chose a pulled pork sandwich with fries (\$9.95). It was a pretty heaping amount of pig on a soft French roll, topped with BBQ sauce and sweet coleslaw. The meat itself was fine, but the sauce was mostly sweet without a lot of tang or spice. The slaw wasn't nearly as sweet and added some welcome texture. I think she enjoyed the fries best of all.

Her husband's buffalo chicken sandwich with onion rings (\$9.99) looked impressive. A whole

chicken breast on a grilled sesame seed bun was breaded and crispy. It was drenched in spicy Buffalo sauce and topped with melted pepper jack cheese, lettuce, tomato and roughly half a sliced avocado. The spice level was nice and warm, but the dish was oddly salty, like, very salty. Thankfully, all the fresh ingredients helped tame that down a bit. The battered onion rings were just as good as the fries.

My breakfast-loving younger daughter chose a blueberry pancake combo (\$11.45) with two large, fluffy pancakes loaded with blueberries and served with a pair of eggs, choice of meat and hashbrowns. The menu noted a blueberry compote topping, but that was absent and frankly unnecessary. Her over-medium eggs were perfect, though the bacon was more than a bit on the dark side. The potatoes were just crispy enough to be called "brown."

I figured I'd give the chicken fried steak dinner (\$11.95) a try, and it wasn't bad. The sautéed mix of broccoli, carrot and zucchini was OK. The whipped spuds were acceptable, and the sausage gravy had enough flavor to do the job. The meat itself gave fairly easily to a fork and was pounded quite thin, akin to *schnitzel* or *milanesa*. Perhaps not the ultimate example, but I'd happily order it again.

The service was outstanding; I can't recall when we've ordered and received food that fast. Beverage refills were on the bounce, despite a packed house. There's room for improvement, but we left full and happy. □

Los Altos Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

5015 Pyramid Way, Sparks, 425-8010
Los Altos Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner is open Sunday through Thursday from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. and Friday and Saturday 6 a.m. to 10 p.m.