

October 13, 2011

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RESTAURANTS

HOW THEY RATE

\$\$ Average meal \$30 and under
\$ Average meal \$15 and under.

cheap eats

By Joan Reminick
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ANTHONY'S COAL FIRED PIZZA

FOOD ★★★
8063 Jericho Tpke., Woodbury
516-367-2625
137 Old Country Rd., Carle Place
516-877-7750
anthonyscoalfiredpizza.com

COST \$\$

AMBIENCE Fair

SERVICE Fair

ESSENTIALS Lunch, daily, 11:30 a.m. to 3 p.m.; dinner, Sunday to Thursday, 3 to 10 p.m., Friday and Saturday, 3 to 11 p.m.; accepts major credit cards; wheelchair accessible.

A food-induced OMG moment comes along rarely enough. But at a chain restaurant? Practically unthinkable. And yet, here I am, experiencing one such moment after another at Anthony's Coal Fired Pizza, a Florida-based franchise founded by Long Island native Anthony Bruno.

At both Long Island branches, virtually everything is cooked in an 800-degree coal oven. Results can be magical.

ALL FIRED UP

Pork ribs roasted with garlic, rosemary, spicy vinegar peppers and white wine emerge tender, juicy, truly fierce. I'm amazed how light, luxurious and knowingly seasoned the meatballs (served with ricotta) turn out. Flying from the coal oven, chicken wings soar. They're lightly



PHOTOS BY YANA PASKOVA

A look of anticipation at Anthony's Coal Fired Pizza in Woodbury, part of a chain

charred, topped with caramelized onion and served with fine focaccia. I'm a big fan of eggplant Marino (named for chain partner NFL great Dan Marino), an ethereal layering of eggplant, cheese and tomato sauce.

The house salad — romaine, chickpeas, celery, onions, Kalamata olives, tomato, hard-boiled eggs in red wine vinaigrette — seems just what nonna might make. Kick it up with Gorgonzola, if you wish.

What really gets my heart pumping is

the roasted cauliflower pizza. Ovoid in shape, it's crowned with the usually pungent cruciferous vegetable tamed into sweet, mellow submission after being roasted with olive oil and garlic, showered with Romano, mozzarella and bread crumbs. And, oh, that gorgeously charred, crisp and flavor-rich crust. Even sandwiches (such as the lemony tuna with olive oil, lemon and arugula) are superior, thanks to house-baked bread.

COOLING OFF

While the signature tomato and cheese pizza is very good, it can't touch that cauliflower pie. Several notches below is the good-not-great Philly cheesesteak pizza.

Be forewarned: the din can be deafening. Twice, servers took orders without writing them down (not the general rule, I'm told) and forgot items.

BOTTOM LINE

Go early or you'll wait forever.



The mellow roasted cauliflower pizza



Chicken wings with caramelized onions