

# Parkside Diner dishes out all-American eats

Every morning for the past two weeks, I've passed the Parkside Diner in Irondequoit and thought, "I really ought to check that place out." The parking lot is always full, the restaurant looks inviting with its colorful neon sign, and it's situated next to a miniature golf course that - if you can even imagine - looks utterly quaint.

That "sometime" finally arrived. After dropping off my son at sailing camp, I made a beeline through Durand Eastman Park and stopped at the appropriately named Parkside Diner.

Open for a little over a decade and owned by brothers Jim and Greg Papas, the Parkside Diner does its genre justice. The food is all-American, the prices would make a miser smile, and the décor is just what you'd expect: Formica tables, vinyl booths, black metal chairs, hanging plants, a few homey touches, and an L-shaped counter with bar stools.

The atmosphere here is also pure diner, a home-away-from-home neighborhood joint where friends and family gather to discuss what's important: golf games, new babies, aching backs, and hot weather. How do I know this? I sat near the counter and let the conversations find their way into my big ears.

The all-day breakfast, lunch, and dinner menu is two things: (1) gargantuan, and (2) grounded in what suits the average American taste bud. Owner Jim Papas, who for years cooked at the Princess Diner (owned by his father, Jerry Papas), said he created the menu based on a keen understanding of what works and what doesn't.

"We're a diner," Papas said with pride. "Our food is good, our service is friendly, our prices are fair, and we work very hard at what we do."

No kidding about the "hard" part - the entrees are endless here. Let's take breakfast, for instance. Like eggs? Parkside serves them fried, scrambled, poached, fluffed up in an omelette, tucked into a fresh croissant with cheese, and a



STAFF PHOTO/ADRIAN KRAUS

Parkside Diner co-owner Jim Papas, left, waitress Sue Courtney and chef Jerry Papas help create a nice dining experience for patrons of the Irondequoit restaurant.



## Dining Out

BY ANNE PALUMBO

gazillion more ways I don't have room to print. How about pancakes? They come buttermilk, buckwheat, chocolate chip, potato, and topped with all kinds of fresh fruits and whipped cream. Waffles your weakness? Parkside doesn't disappoint with Belgian waffles served plain, with fruit, and a la mode.

Enough about breakfast. There's the huge lunch menu to discuss. Let's see now, I counted over 50 different sandwiches. Thatzalottabread. Since I can't list them all, I want you to do something. Close your eyes and think of your favorite sandwich: hot, cold, wrap, melt, whatever. I'll do it too. Mine is grilled cheese and tuna. Now, I'm going to open my eyes and see if it's on the menu. Yes, there it is, right under bacon, lettuce, and tomato. I'm guessing yours will be there too.

OK, now dinner. What are you hungry for? Homemade meatloaf? Spaghetti and meat-

balls? London broil? Ham steak? Roast turkey with dressing? Cobb salad? Fried chicken? Fresh fruit plate? Salmon steak? Again, the selection is ambitious and straightforward.

Since I happened by around 9 a.m., I opted to try an unusual pancake listed on the specials board: sweet potato. A good 8 inches across, it had a slightly denser texture than your standard buttermilk pancake and a much richer taste, almost pumpkin-y. I loved it, and I especially loved it when syrup and whipped cream mysteriously found their way onto each forkful.

Most of the servers have been at Parkside Diner for seven years or more. That's a long time to be at any job, especially a strenuous one like waitressing, so you know management is doing something right. "We love our bosses!" one of the waitresses said when asked why she stayed.

The adjacent Parkside Whispering Pines miniature golf course wasn't open when I ate, but I moseyed on over anyway and set eyes on - are you ready? - the oldest miniature golf course in America. Papas excitedly informed me that his

**WHAT:** Parkside Diner  
**WHERE:** 4353 Culver Road, Irondequoit  
**PHONE:** 323-2710  
**HOURS:** All-day menu served seven days a week, 6 a.m. to 9 p.m.  
**Miniature golf summer hours:** 11 a.m. to 11 p.m.  
**PRICES:** Breakfast, \$1.35 to \$6.25. Lunch, \$1.85 to \$5.95. Dinner, \$5.75 to \$10.25.  
**COMFORT:** Casual, no smoking, wheelchair-accessible.

course was recently registered with the Preservation Board of National Landmarks. "It's the first miniature golf course ever built in America," he said. So check it out. Tucked under a canopy of towering pines, the plastic-free course is laden with old stones and fairly well preserved.

Parkside Diner offers complementary toothpicks on the way out. I watched two men shake a few from the container and say to the hostess, "See you tonight." That just about sums up what this friendly, all-American diner is all about.