
BAGPIPES PUTS ITS BEST WARES FORWARD

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Once upon a time, a girl with a lovely figure wore a very low-cut shirt and push-up bra to a gathering. As all of her boyfriend's close guy friends stared at the ceiling or very carefully at her hairline, the situation grew slightly uncomfortable. One of the guys' mothers, who'd known the girl for years, smiled at her and said: "The girls are looking good." Magically, the discomfort disappeared. The guys continued to talk to her hairline, but at least someone acknowledged the elephants in the room.

I thought of that story as some male friends and I were deep into a "where to look" conversation. To acknowledge? To not acknowledge? Who should acknowledge? When? It was a conundrum we'd arrived at naturally, since we'd popped into the Bagpipes Eatery and Pub, which opened Dec. 1 at the corner of Burnet Road and U.S. 183 next door to the Lane 4 swim shop.

The waitresses' outfits inspired my boyfriend to call the place "Hooters with kilts." "A Catholic schoolboy fantasy of the Catholic schoolgirl uniform" was what came to my mind. In other words, tiny plaid skirts and deeply cut blouses. Not my cup of tea (or pint of Guinness, as the case may be), but good for launching thoughtful conversations about mores and manners.

Bagpipes' main area is set up more like a restaurant than a pub — wide-open room, lots of tables for four, rather than snugs, nooks and crannies — and there are a dozen flat-screen, 42-inch TVs throughout the eatery for watching big sporting events. Or small ones. Any sports package DirectTV offers, Bagpipes has ordered. Several more TVs are on the way, and one of the rooms can be (and sometimes is) closed off for private parties. A full menu offers "Traditional Fare" such as Irish beef, Guinness stew and shepherd's pie to more standard American dishes such as pizza and chicken tenders.

The bar area is smaller: It seats about 36. The entire bar/restaurant has Wi-Fi, like Pluckers, which is a few doors down; I've seen people in work clothes pop laptops out, either playing in a fantasy sports league or finishing up a long meeting with a beer, I'd guess. Swords, drums, bagpipes, signs like "Beer is the reason I get up in the afternoon" and "Irish pub" decorate the walls.

Bagpipes identifies as a Scottish/Irish/British pub, but it feels more like a sports bar looking for a good reason for staff to wear teeny kilts and midriff-baring bosom shirts. (For the record, male employees wear long pants—not kilts — and short-sleeve shirts.) Bagpipes carries 24 beers on tap, some from Scotland, England and Ireland, including Guinness, Newcastle, Smithwick's and Belhaven.

But some of the menu items are a bit of a stretch, such as the Celtic garden burger or the Shamrock cheesesteak. And the specialty drinks are such things as Celtic gold margaritas

(made with Tres Generaciones Plata tequila, Grand Marnier, Tuaca and lime juice) and Long Island Celtic tea (made with Tito's vodka, Southern Comfort, peach schnapps, Captain Morgan, sweet 'n' sour and Sprite). I'm not sure what's truly Celtic, or even mildly Celtic, about that, unless it's that if you drink a few of them, even bad bagpipe playing sounds good.

Having delved so deeply into clothes, I should tell you that the staffers filling those get-ups out were uniformly polite, responsive and efficient. They knew the menu reasonably well and when they didn't know the answer to a question, they always quickly found someone who did. And my boyfriend and I very deliberately looked at their eyes as they answered.

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