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Restaurant review: Former charm, value not lost at new Anchor Inn

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BY JOAN NEENO/SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE
Thursday, May 5, 2016



ANCHOR INN PHOTO

The Anchor Inn in Newville

EDGERTON—If you’ve ever spent time around Lake Koshkonong or boating on the Rock River, it’s hard to think about summer without the Anchor Inn.

But that’s precisely what we had to do for much of last

ANCHOR INN

Address: 718 E. Highway 59, Edgerton.

summer after the Anchor burned down in August 2014. The outdoor Naughty Mermaid Bar and outside stage were open on weekends, but sitting in the shadow of a huge construction

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Phone: 608-884-7565

Website: anchorfun.com

Hours: 11 a.m.-close Monday-Friday, 10 a.m.-close Saturday and 9 a.m.-close Sunday.

Reservations: Not accepted

Credit cards: Accepted

Wheelchair access: Yes

Vegetarian items: Yes

Menu: Selection of wraps, salads, burgers, sandwiches and nightly specials.

Ratings

Food: 3.5 plates

Service: 3.5 plates

Cost: \$4-\$17

Value: 3.5 plates

5 plates—Outstanding
 4 plates—Above average
 3 plates—Average
 2 plates—Below average
 1 plate—Poor

project just didn't feel like the real deal.

The new, bigger and quite impressive Anchor Inn has been open since late last summer. Since it opened in the months after summer's prime, the event almost felt like a soft opening with not as many staff members and not much hoopla.

But summer 2016 is in sight, and it's time to get reacquainted with the Anchor.

We had a table of eight on a recent Friday night that was disappointingly chilly and gray. There was no sitting out on the patio, but the views of the Rock River from the floor-to-ceiling windows almost made up for it.

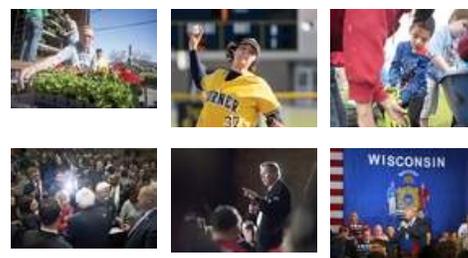
The main dining room and bar feature a soaring ceiling, concrete floors, lots of windows, rough wooden siding and lots of style.

As someone with a moderate hearing impairment, the design made me nervous. It looks like a beautiful echo chamber of hard surfaces. Thankfully, the Anchor recently installed sound-absorbing panels on its cathedral ceiling, so while it's still loud, the noise is manageable. I could hear the people sitting closest to me without struggle, which is pretty darn good on a Friday night.

There's now a second-floor banquet space, and the jumbo tent—which was a permanent fixture before the fire—has been replaced by another year-round banquet space. It's all gorgeous but, to quote Joni Mitchell, "you don't know what

you've got 'til it's gone." I miss the ramshackle nature of the old Anchor, but there's no doubt the new building is better suited to

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meet the demands of its large customer base.

To go with a round of beer, Old-Fashioneds and whiskeys we ordered, our group shared baskets of lightly breaded, fried pickle chips called “frickles” (\$6.25) and cheese curds (\$8). Both came with ranch dressing. They were pretty standard bar appetizers, but they were tasty nonetheless.

The menu looks familiar if not exactly the same as before the fire. The fish fry selection is still among the best in the area. Our friends Lori and Jim both had the bluegill (\$16.95), which came with a generous portion of fried filets, fries, cole slaw and heavily buttered marble rye bread. Unfortunately, Lori’s fish came out cold, but both said the fish was good.

Nancy and Dan both ordered the fried cod (\$11.95), which was flaky and reliably tasty. In combination with a really impressive beer assortment, it’s no wonder the place was packed by the time we left.

My husband, Richard, tried the prime rib sandwich (\$14.95), which was a half-pound of shaved steak served on a soft hoagie bun with the Anchor’s “special sauce.” The meat was extremely tender and juicy. It was an exceptionally good sandwich.

Nigella, Robyn and I had burgers. They both ordered the Cheddar Head (\$9.50), which came with two slices of cheese and fried onions. I tried the Smokin’ Bessy (\$9.50), which was topped with American cheese, bacon and barbecue sauce. The half-pound burgers were well seasoned and cooked to a light pink medium.

With her burger, Robyn substituted sweet potato fries for an additional 75 cents. The fries were crisp, well salted and plentiful. It’s nice to know the Anchor’s burgers remain reliably good.

But wine drinkers might want to think again. It’s really not a wine type of place. Some members of the group decided to share a bottle of red wine because they’re not beer lovers. The wine was nice and cold, having come right from the refrigerator. But that’s not exactly how you want to drink red wine, so we warmed up the filled glasses with our hands. Next time, I’ll stick with an Old-Fashioned.

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Our server was funny, hustled and was on top of things. That's a pretty typical experience at the Anchor, as I recall from previous summers. The servers are responsive, work hard and make it fun to hang out there.

It's looking rather gussied up now, but from a food perspective the Anchor Inn is nothing fancy. And that's just fine. A reliable spot for a good burger and fish fry is a wonderful thing.

Save me a picnic table in front of the stage with one of their fresh vodka lemonades.

Joan Neeno is a freelance writer who reviews regional restaurants for The Gazette.



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