

BY KIM GALEAZ

ONE COMMENT: ‘THESE ARE some of the best cheese fries I’ve ever had.’ And, at another restaurant: “I’m definitely bringing a date here.”

Those words came from the satisfied mouths of two of my single guy friends, Pete and Dave, as we visited Chatham Tap and El Sol De Tala, respectively.

Since my normal eating partner, Jeff, was away, I enlisted their help to check out a few Downtown restaurants to once again prove that absolutely every – and I mean every – restaurant has healthful choices on the menu. It’s just a matter of looking for them and then ordering them. Which I didn’t do when I visited Chatham Tap and El Sol De Tala, because I was in my “20-percent zone” – that time for decadent overindulgence balanced by the healthiest eating 80 percent of the time.

Eating out with your single guy friends is downright eye-opening. I mean, you learn the most amazing things about them simply because of what’s on a menu. Join me in another eating escapade at two of our terrific downtown restaurants.

CHATHAM TAP. I asked my good friend, Pete Kilmer, the co-owner of Downtown Comics, to join me at Chatham Tap because he loves to try new beers and Chatham Tap bills itself as having the best beer list in Indy. One minor problem. It was lunchtime, not happy hour or dinnertime. With half a work day left, we skipped the drinking and instead filled up on the hearty fare this English-style pub has to offer.

In spite of the abundance of typical English-style fried fare on the menu, you



■ DINING DOWNTOWN WITH THE DIETITIAN

Healthy - and tasty - eating at El Sol and Chatham Tap

◀ El Sol’s Cochinta Pibil is a slow-roasted achiote marinated pork in banana leaves, then shredded with xnipec (Yucatan pico de gallo), sweet plantains and black beans.

won’t have a problem spotting healthier choices. You’ll find hummus for an appetizer, many different vegetable-rich salads, like English Walnut Salad, Spring Salad and Spinach Avocado Feta Salad. There’s even an omega-3 fatty acid-rich Salmon Salad made with lettuce and orange slices. Three different fat free dressings are available for those salads in case you don’t want the full fat dressings. Just remember though, walnut vinaigrette has omega-3 attributes and the roasted red pepper vinaigrette contains lots of antioxidants from the red pepper.

Pete had commented before even opening the menu that he totally agreed with me that you could find something healthy at *any* type of restaurant. “Even if it’s just one of those veggie sandwiches,” he said. Well, wouldn’t



▲ The Veggie Sandwich at Chatham Tap features avocado, red onion, tomato, lettuce and hummus.

you know?! Right there in the sandwich section on the Chatham Tap menu is that ubiquitous Veggie Sandwich made with avocado, red onion, tomato, lettuce and hummus.

Another healthy sandwich option is the Garlic Pork Tenderloin, which can be ordered grilled instead of breaded.

Pete ordered the grilled pork tenderloin. When I asked him why he wasn't getting it breaded, he replied in typical guy-speak, something like: "because all that breading and fried stuff makes you too sluggish if you eat it too early in the day. And then you can't do your busy body work." What?! How early is too early? I asked. "Oh you know, maybe 2 or 3 o'clock, but that's not a hard and fast rule." Well obviously not, because although Pete got a gold star for ordering his pork tenderloin grilled, he certainly had (more than) his fair share of fried goodies. And it was only noon.

All sandwiches come with your choice of homemade potato chips, coleslaw or cottage cheese. The coleslaw is going to count as a veggie serving due to the cabbage, and the cottage cheese is a great calcium source – but Pete couldn't resist the homemade crunchy potato chips. For just a small up charge, you can substitute homemade French fries, also a well-worth-it indulgence.



▲ Chatham Tap's Garlic and Cheese Chips doesn't fall among the healthiest of menu choices, but delights nevertheless.

◀ The dish known as Ameca at El Sol de Tala features two freshly homemade roasted Poblano chiles rellenos, one filled with cheese and the other with ground beef and pork picadillo. Ameca is served with salad, beans and rice.

cut, and in fact it's just as lean as boneless, skinless chicken breast with only 3 grams fat in a 3-ounce cooked serving. Order it breaded, however, and you completely obliterate those lean stats.

Since I was in my "20-percent zone" at Chatham Tap, I pondered the Rubeen sandwich (fat, fat and more fat – but, hey, that sauerkraut is from cabbage, right?). But since I wanted to try one of the specialty pizzas, I opted for the Reuben pizza and had the best

of both worlds.

Pete and I were still curious about the salads, so we decided to split the Spicy Steak Salad with fat-free Ranch dressing. We even ordered extra pico de gallo with the salad for more disease-fighting nutrients from the tomatoes. The rib-eye

strips – a portion-controlled and appropriate 4 ounces - were relatively lean and had a good spice kick.

While I may know Reubens, Pete considers himself somewhat of a cheese-fry connoisseur. He spotted Garlic and Cheese Chips, "a British Isles favorite," and immediately said we had to try them so he could compare them to others he's had. I trusted Pete's expert palate for all things cheese-slathered and fried, so when he proclaimed, "These are some of the best cheese fries I've ever had," I was excited and proud for Chatham Tap. One order of these heavenly fried sliced potatoes topped with shredded cheddar and a creamy garlic dressing is more than enough for two people.

Our waiter, Jimmy, insisted that we try their signature Fish & Chips, assuring us it was outstanding, so we agreed to taste just a tiny sample. While we waited for them to arrive, I babbled to Pete that I just don't get Fish & Chips and didn't even know when I last ate them and why do they call them chips anyway when they're fries.

"Haven't you ever been to Long John Silver's!?"

he asked. "Well, Pete, I'm sure I have but can't even remember when. Definitely not in any of the 16 years since I've known you." I was so glad I broke that 16-year no-fish-and-chips streak at Chatham Tap because they were worth every calorie and fat gram. The breading and fish just melted in my mouth and the seasoned fries were perfectly cooked and spiced. Jimmy said the breading even has a little Bass Ale in it.

I noticed Pete didn't finish his grilled pork tenderloin or homemade chips – both excellent in his opinion. When I asked why, he said "You don't need to always clean your plate. And you shouldn't just inhale your food or you won't know when you're full. How many times did *you* tell me that!"

He actually listened to me. I was totally amazed. Thrilled too, because he didn't just *hear* me, he actually *practiced* my advice.

Dessert time. We wanted "just a taste" of the Apple & Pear Crumble for dessert, since Jimmy raved about it and I love all things streusel. He was right. Warm, sweet and decadent.

Pete and I can't wait to visit Chatham Tap again for all the other tempting menu items. Like one of the numerous micro-brewery or imported beers. Or one of the four ground beef



If you're looking to boost the fiber and nutrients in your sandwich at Chatham Tap, you can substitute one of the whole-grain bread choices (black bean and salsa or multi-grain).

Here's an FYI on that pork tenderloin: it's the leanest pork

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burgers (8 ounces precooked for a hearty burger) and one “veggie” burger – a portabella mushroom cap topped with gouda cheese, garlic mayo, avocado and red onion. The dinner menu showcases a few traditional English dishes, such as Steak and Guinness Pie, which is cubed sirloin (a lean cut of beef), simmered in a sauce of raisins, onions, bacon, brown sugar and Guinness and topped with a pie shell. Another, Old English Sausage and Mash, is pork sausage served over a bed of mashed potatoes and covered in red onion gravy. But only on Sunday can you order the Traditional English Sunday Dinner – roast beef served with Yorkshire pudding, peas and mashed potatoes. Yum.

EL SOL DE TALA. It’s like having an old friend come back to Indy after moving away. While El Sol de Tala owner Javier Amezcua chatted with me and my friend, Dave Russell, at lunch recently, four different guests walked by to thank him and tell him they’re glad he’s open again. Yes, we’re all glad this establishment serving authentic Mexican food since 1979 is back in business after a couple years of sabbatical.

Technically, El Sol de Tala isn’t located in one of our historic Downtown neighborhoods, but it’s close enough. It’s roughly a 2½-mile drive east on Washington Street, or a 40-minute power walk if you want to counterbalance those extra guacamole calories.

Dave, an Old Northside resident and radio reporter for Brownfield Ag News, had never been to the old El Sol de Tala, so he couldn’t appreciate the new interior, new plates and new menu offerings. But he could appreciate the wide variety of authentic dishes, including many from the Yucatan and Jalisco regions of Mexico. El Sol still serves burritos, enchiladas and tacos, but they really excel in specific regional cuisine – and that’s where you’ll find some of the healthiest options. Dave noticed right away that most of the meat, poultry and fish in these regional dishes is prepared healthfully, either marinated, roasted, grilled or sautéed.

We dived into our basket of fresh, hot tortilla chips served with delicious homemade salsa while we studied the menu. I reminded Dave about the Bread Basket Blues –eating so many chips or so much bread that, by the time your meal arrives, you’re too stuffed to eat. But I encouraged him to have salsa with every chip he *did* eat, because salsa, made from tomatoes, contains a valuable source of lycopene to help reduce prostate cancer risk.

Although appetizers are unnecessary at Mexican restaurants, I was too curious about the quesadilla tres hongos, which means “quesadilla with three mushrooms.” Shitake,

cremini and portobello, in this case. Two authentic Mexican cheeses, Chihuahua and cotija, were also part of the quesadilla and in just the right amount from both a taste and health perspective.

Back to those three mushrooms. Mushrooms are the most recent vegetable to join the fray of superfood promotion. Mushrooms contain all sorts of vitamins, minerals and disease-fighting nutrients. And they can help your immune system, too. Oh, and they’re naturally fat free and very low-calorie.

Guacamole is another appetizer with a superfood ingredient. El Sol’s guacamole is made with fresh tomatoes, onions, jalapenos, lime juice, salt – and plenty of heart-healthy, nutrient-rich and chunky pieces of avocado. Definitely worth the calories.

Dave ordered poc chuc, marinated pork loin thinly sliced with orange and lime juices and a hint of red recado with xnipec (a Yucatan pico de gallo). He thoroughly enjoyed the zesty, unique flavors. He did offer to share a (tiny) piece and I agreed the pork was lean, flavorful and not overcooked. Since neither one of us knew what “red recado” was, we asked our wonderfully kind, patient and thorough waitress to educate us. Basically, recados are marinated pastes of cloves, black pepper, oregano, cumin, garlic, coriander and vinegar and anchote seed, which makes it red. The dietitian in me just loves this type of seasoning – so much great flavor without any fat!

Most of the entrees at El Sol de Tala are served with their homemade (daily) black beans instead of standard refried beans. We both couldn’t get over the great texture and taste. We were so busy taking bites I didn’t even remember to bore Dave with my “beans are one of the most nutrient-rich foods you can eat” spiel.

Another side dish accompanying many of the entrees is sweet plantains. Dave, who is currently expanding his culinary horizons, had never eaten plantains and was a bit hesitant. I did my best to allay his fears by explaining they were simply cooked Latin bananas, very nutrient-rich and very delicious. He ended up agreeing.

Before coming to El Sol de Tala, I had received a “don’t forget to order a side dish of the mole” tip from a friend (the legendary Travis DiNicola of Urban Times and Indy Reads fame). But no dinky side dish for me, however. I wanted a lot of mole. So I ordered the Pollo en Mole, grilled chicken breast simmered in the classic mole sauce. It was one of the best moles I’ve ever eaten.

Dave, however, was even more hesitant about this rich, dark, reddish-brown sauce than the plantains. But once again

he was pleasantly surprised and so proud of himself for trying such a complex dish. Mole is a very unique concoction of cooked ingredients, usually onion, garlic, several varieties of chilies, ground pumpkin and/or sesame seeds and maybe anise seeds, raisins, a little peanut butter and a little oil, but always some Mexican chocolate. That is why Dave’s first bite reminded him of a really, really, dark chocolate cookie. Again, so much flavor and seasoning with minimal fat.

Dave and I thoroughly enjoyed the Mixiote, which is made fresh daily at El Sol de Tala. Mixiote is lamb shanks steamed in 13 spices and tequila-guajilillo (a type of pepper) sauce, then wrapped in banana leaves and served with beans, guacamole and lime wedges. Dave proclaimed the lamb “even better” with squirts of fresh lime.

“Those frog legs sound good” said Dave, as we pondered what to order at our next visit to El Sol de Tala. I stared, waited for a grin, a laugh, something, anything that would indicate he was kidding. I mean, after all, this is Dave. Dave who is *trying* to be more culinarily adventurous. Dave who doesn’t even own a lemon zester.

“You’re serious, aren’t you?” I asked. Yep. He was. In fact, I was about to learn even more interesting tidbits about Dave.

“Frog legs are great! I used to eat them all the time when I was growing up in Ohio.” I was speechless; he continued. “We’d go frog gigging at night in the creeks and ponds and then roll them in flour and fry them. It was great fun.” Dave assured me that his preference at this stage of life is dating, not frog gigging.

Dave also prefers really good desserts, but while we tried to decide which one of the three to order, all he could say was:

“I’m definitely bringing a date here and I’ll order dessert *for* her.”

Oh brother. I wondered how long it would be before he noticed the Tamal de Chocolate was “voted by our female patrons as the most sensual dessert.” Once he got over the whole sensual dessert thing, he resumed culinary curiosity and asked about flan. He hadn’t ever tried it, but loved crème brûlée. Once I described flan as similar to that, he was sold.

I was sold, as well, on the flan. And the Crepa de Chocolate (chocolate and pecan crepes filled with plantains and a sweet, Mexican sauce and served with vanilla bean ice cream). And the Tamal de Chocolate (flourless chocolate tamale with raspberry sauce and dulce de leche.) Ordering all three is what any dessert-loving dietitian would do on her planned day of over-indulgence. ■