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## **\$29 & Under: City Squire serves excellent casual food; and those wings!**

By Caroline Lee

### **The City Squire**

Well, Mom and I visited the City Squire just off Union Street recently and we came away contented and impressed. The restaurant is a neighborhood tavern, more than a hundred years old, taken over in 2007 by Karen Card and Kathleen Olesko, who appear to be doing a good job running the place.

If you're going for a meal, then you probably want to enter on the side of the building by the parking lot. The front entrance has four steps up and a door that opens out at the top of the stairs and leads into the bar. Which was busy, by the way, on a late afternoon early in the week.

We seated ourselves in at a sunny table with a view of Keyes Avenue. "Would you like me to pull down the shade?" said the server. She showed us how to raise and lower the blind, with a level of consideration we liked very much.

The bar is separated from the dining room, although they share an entranceway. Tables for four line the walls of the long dining room, with plenty of elbow room between. It's comfortable, cheerful, clean and, even in the daytime, cozy.

You won't spend a lot at the City Squire, and you'll bring home leftovers. The specialty sandwiches and wraps range in price from \$5.99 for a grilled cheese, to \$8.99 for the Squire club. And all come with pickle and chips, and fries, coleslaw, potato or macaroni salad, or applesauce are no extra charge. I like that.

The menu features a variety of burgers, and the dinner menu covers all the basics, like steaks and chicken dishes, along with comfort food like meatloaf and pierogi. The most you'll pay is \$16.99 for a 12-ounce New York strip steak.

Everything else is less, and the dinners include soup or salad. There were two homemade soups on the menu that day.

### **Winning wings**

You must try the wings. These are prize-winning wings, and I'll tell you why. They are modest in size, but not in character. You can see how crisp the skin is. You will not find a chewy, hard, or overcooked bit anywhere on these wings. The server told us that the kitchen makes them perfect every time.

We started with a dozen, medium (\$7.50), a concession on Mom's part; she'd enjoy the fire-in-the-hole heat level. They were perfect. They were jewels. "Crunch," said the skin, as I took the first bite. The meat was moist and tender, much better than what you'd expect of a wing. Mom thought the homemade blue cheese dressing was tasty, and fished out the chunks of cheese. We each had three wings, and then waited virtuously for the rest of our food, although our eyes strayed over to them frequently.

Happily, we didn't wait long. Boy, did our food look good. Mom had the Memphis Reuben (\$7.99), a unique combination of barbecued pulled pork, cheddar cheese, and coleslaw on grilled hearty bread.

City Squire gets points for fries, which are golden and perfectly cooked. "I could heat these up tomorrow and they'd be just as good," said Mom, an endorsement alluding to their crispness and dryness. She especially liked the light seasoned coating. The kitchen does not see the other food on the plate as an impediment to serving a big portion of fries. They simply covered the sandwich with them.

Mom unearthed the Reuben and declared it excellent. The pork was juicy and tender. “Not stringy or chewy at all,” she said. The sweet barbecue sauce is a nice contrast to the tangy coleslaw, and the cheese helped to hold things together. The bread was grilled just right, with a crispy brown ring around the edge where the crust is.

### **Unique item**

Here’s something different, and done well: the Edison (\$8.25), a sandwich of eggplant parmesan on garlic toast. It’s not something I’d order when off duty, but it sounded like something worth investigating. When I pulled the halves of the hot sandwich apart, the mozzarella cheese made strings that stretched and stretched between them. But they don’t overdo the cheese or sauce on the breaded and fried slices of eggplant. And this was not a difficult sandwich to eat, despite what you might think. It stayed together and the delicate flavor and the presence of the eggplant managed to come through all that other stuff. Very nicely done.

You don’t always see homemade potato chips. It can’t be because they’re hard to make, since restaurants crank out french fries all the time. The ones at City Squire are excellent: no grease; not a bit, not even a shiny spot on any of them, and there were a lot to examine. Just salt and a bit of freshly ground black pepper.

The City Squire gets major points for their chips.

Now let me tell you about the bread they used for our sandwiches: I was a bit surprised that Mom’s Reuben didn’t come on rye, but when I saw how it was assembled, it became clear. This thick but soft and tasty bread goes up against a messy Reuben or lots of marinara sauce and holds its own. When our leftover sandwich halves were wrapped at the end of the meal, the bread was still intact.

We waited a bit to get the check, probably because the nice server thought we’d like to linger over our dinners. The leftovers were wrapped, and the bill presented: \$28.02 with one soda and tax but before tip.

### **Third opinion**

I arrived home to find husband Eric hungrily waiting for his own dinner to cook. He opened the box to inspect the leftover wings and immediately went for the blue cheese, popping off the cover and then dipping in a drumstick. One, two, three, four went down the hatch. “I left you two,” he said graciously. “But if you don’t want them, then I’ll eat them.”

That makes three of us who say that if you want some really special wings, go to the City Squire restaurant, where you will also find excellent casual food, attentive service and reasonable prices.