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TGIF

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HOT STUFF!

ANTHONY'S COAL-FIRED
PIZZA IN PALM BEACH
GARDENS. PAGE 16

Coal is king

At Anthony's, the key to great pizza is how the oven is fired up

By CHARLES PASSY
Palm Beach Post Restaurant Critic

It's all in the coal.

Really, that's all there is to making a great pizza. You can have your froufrou toppings (Thai chicken, anyone?). You can ship in the water for your dough from New York or Naples. You can have the best list possible of full-flavored Italian red wines to complement your pies.

But if you ain't got a coal-fired oven, what's the point? That's what the proprietors of Anthony's Coal Fired Pizza, a growing South Florida chain with Palm Beach County locations in Palm Beach Gardens, Boca Raton and Delray Beach, understand intuitively. And even though they've got plenty of competition in the coal department these days, it's hard to imagine anyone besting Anthony's in terms of execution or service.

Although this is still family-friendly dining by most definitions of the term, it's not pizza on the cheap: Pies at Anthony's run well into the \$15-to-\$20 range for a large — not what you'd pay at Pizza Hut or even a respectable neighborhood pizza parlor. You may also pay a price in terms of the wait (they don't take reservations). When I showed up at the Palm Beach Gardens loca-

REVIEW

Anthony's Coal Fired Pizza

FOOD: A-
SERVICE: B

ADDRESS: 2680 PGA Blvd., Palm Beach Gardens

TELEPHONE: (561) 804-7777

PRICE RANGE:
Moderate

HOURS: 11:30 a.m. to 10 p.m., Monday to Saturday; 12:30 to 10 p.m., Sunday

CREDIT CARDS: MC, V, AmEx, Disc.

RESERVATIONS: No
WHEELCHAIR ACCESS: Yes, including restrooms

WEB SITE: anthony's coalfiredpizza.com

WHAT THE GRADES MEAN:

- A** — Excellent
- B** — Good
- C** — Average
- D** — Poor
- F** — Don't bother

tion on a Monday night — usually not a busy time for restaurants — I was told I was looking at 30 minutes or more. Even on

a rainy Tuesday, I had a 10-minute wait.

But once I finally was seated, Anthony's showed its charms. The restaurant has the right vibe: busy and relaxing at once. The walls are adorned with rock 'n' roll and sports memorabilia. The tables are tightly packed, but everyone seems to be having too much fun to notice.

Anthony's bill of fare is a perfect example of the less-is-more school of menu planning.

There are pizza and calzones, a few sandwiches and appetizers, and a solitary dessert offering. Yes, your choices are limited, but that means the kitchen can focus all the more on the task at hand.

That was evident beginning with the two pre-pizza offerings my table enjoyed. An order of coal-oven-roasted chicken wings (\$8.50 for 10) was good in every possible way — meaty wings with the right hint of the fire, transformed into something thoroughly Italian by virtue of the accompanying grilled onions and focaccia.

I also was pleasantly surprised by the quality of a house salad (\$8.50 for a serving that can easily feed two), with nicely crisp greens, a tangy house dressing (though it wouldn't hurt to ease off a



APPETIZING: The meaty chicken wings came with grilled onions and focaccia.

little on the vinegar) and truly ripe tomatoes.

On to the pizza. Because of the coal oven, Anthony's pies come out crispy — a sign warns patrons that well-done is the only way to go — with a "burnt" taste that's actually welcome. (It has that subtle flavor of charcoal.) Wed to that quality ingredients — a robust tomato sauce, mozzarella that doesn't have any tell-tale commercial blandness — and you've got all you want in a pizza.

But what about toppings? Anthony's has them, but the difference, again,

is the quality — sausage that has some real Italian pedigree to it, Calamata olives that bring a welcome edge of saltiness, etc.

You can mix and match toppings to your heart's content — a small two-topping pie with olives and prosciutto ran me \$13.75, and a small specialty pie with broccoli rabe and sausage went for \$15.75. My only warning: Stick with toppings that won't weigh down your pie and make the crust slightly soggy — that's what happened with the broccoli rabe.

Beyond pizza, the calzones are first-rate, though I do wish the small — \$15 with sweet peppers — was more generously sized. As for the sandwiches, I tried the tuna focaccia (\$7.50), which essentially combined the house salad with tuna — nothing fancy, but it was nice to enjoy a tuna sandwich whose calling card wasn't an abundance

FIRE IT UP:

Anthony's pies come out crispy, with a subtle flavor of charcoal. A sign warns patrons that they should expect to get their pies well-done, but don't worry: They still taste great.

Staff photos by ALLEN EYESTONE

of mayonnaise.

And if you want a glass of wine or bottle of beer, Anthony's won't disappoint: The list of offerings is compact — again, Anthony's maintains its focus — but the selections are fairly priced. (You'll find those full-flavored Italian reds, but I was just as happy with a bottle of Peroni, Italy's lager of choice, for five bucks.) Oddly enough, sodas are available only in bottles — no free refills.

But there are plenty of free smiles to go around. Service is casually genial, befitting the mood of the place. That said, you'll probably wait a while for your pie — there's only so much your waiter can do when the place gets busy.

The good news is that the wait is worth it. The better news is that Anthony's has plans to continue expanding. This is a great time to be a pizza lover in South Florida.