

# Food at Ventura's is excellent, although the prices are a bit high

BY SCOTT CRONICK  
At The Shore, (609) 272-7017

I thank goodness for the state's new no-smoking law in bars. It enables me to take my family places that we never would go before ... such as Ventura's Offshore Cafe in Northfield.

Although Ventura's is more of a restaurant than a bar — a far cry from when this place used to be the Rugby — the smoke from the bar area would often find its way to the dining area. Now, with that problem alleviated, we rediscovered Ventura's, and we are glad we did.

I used to go to Ventura's quite a bit when I used to work nights. But those late evenings were mostly spent drinking and picking on finger food. After hearing from a lot of people how consistently great Ventura's menu is, we were looking forward to trying it ourselves.

We walked in on a recent Saturday night to a very busy restaurant, but luckily we didn't have to wait. We were seated at a nice table in the main dining room near the gorgeous rock fireplace where we admired the decor, particularly the sharp colors, hardwood floors, wood accents and comfortable seating.

We also admired the menu, which is large and undoubtedly has something for everyone, including bar munchies, pizza, soups, salads, Italian, burgers, steaks, sandwiches and other entrees.

We didn't admire the prices

## family fare

since my son and I don't care for mussels. The tender mussels — approximately 4 pounds of them — came sauteed in fresh sliced garlic and a mild red sauce and were terrific. My finicky son even gave them a try and liked them.

My son and I shared the Mozzarella Monsanto (\$6.95), a large chunk of pure mozzarella that was freshly breaded and fried. It came out oozing on the plate, and the homemade marinara sauce served as a perfect accompaniment. It disappeared quickly.

The kids' menu is absolutely fantastic. With approximately 10 items averaging between

four and five bucks, kids can have everything from hamburgers and chicken fingers to chicken parmigiana and spaghetti and meatballs.

My stepdaughter's "Fwied Shwimpies" (\$6) was no ordinary kid's meal. Three huge, perfectly battered fried jumbo shrimp were butterfied and delicious, served with french fries. My son's chicken quesadilla (\$4) was a little dry, but he didn't seem to mind. It would have been nice if the quesadilla was served with a side dish of fries or tortilla chips, though.

Since Ventura's is known for its Italian food, my wife and I went in that direction.

She had the Pasta Daniella (\$18.95) — shrimp, spinach and roasted red peppers in a garlic rosa sauce served over a choice of pasta. The linguini was perfectly cooked, and the sauce was flavorful and had a nice, creamy consistency. The shrimp also were tender and

plentiful.

I had the veal parmigiana (\$22.95), and it was one of the best veal parms I ever had in the area. The milk-fed veal was pounded thin and fried golden brown and topped with melted provolone and marinara sauce, and it was served with a side of

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HOW MUCH: Our bill for four, including two appetizers, two entrees, two kids' meals and one dessert was \$90.20. Appetizers range from \$5.95 to \$14.95; sandwiches and burgers range from \$5.25 to \$9.50; entrees range from \$12.95 to \$32.95.

SERVICE: Disabled access through front door, credit cards accepted, liquor license, no reservations.

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We didn't admire the prices ... but more on that later.

When we first sat down, the kids were given a nice placemat with crayons to keep them busy, and a bread basket featuring warm Italian bread was placed on our table. Later, another basket of unbelievable fresh pizza bread arrived. Two versions of the bread — one red and one white — made us declare that this was, hands down, the best bread served at any casual restaurant in southern New Jersey.

The large appetizer selection made us play "Let's Make a Deal" at the table. After tossing around different options, my wife put her foot down and said she wanted Mussels Ventura (\$13.95), which our stepdaughter agreed to share

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# family fare

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pasta that was equally delicious.

For dessert, we all shared a peanut-butter fudge-brownie sundae (\$6) that came exactly as it was described. The large

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much for a meal out with the family without any drinks. Granted, the food is excellent and we ordered an extra appetizer, but we found the portions to be ridiculously large.

My veal dinner was easily twice the size as it should have been. Instead of one large piece of veal, it came with two. As I did, my wife took home at least half of her dinner, and we really don't enjoy eating leftovers the next day.

We would rather see smaller portions and lower prices. Doesn't 4 pounds of mussels seem a little excessive?

It seemed as though every-

one was walking out with a doggie bag.

So if you go to Ventura's — and we recommend that you do — be prepared to take home leftovers or just skip the appetizers altogether. Or, you can share a meal.

Ventura's charges an extra \$5 to share, but the staff splits the meal for you, and the price includes a soup or salad for both diners, so it's worth it.

Now that Ventura's is smoke free, it is a great, relaxing place to take the family.

But the thing you'll remember the most is the great food on the menu.