

Fussy or Futsy Belltown Dining? You Decide.

by Ronald Holden

Answer me this one, sports fans: Why would a popular, one-eyed café on the sunny sidewalk along First Avenue—why would any café, anywhere, for that matter—turn away a couple of hungry, thirsty customers at 2:05 p.m. on a Sunday afternoon with a curt, “Sorry, we’re closed?” Closed? At five past two? In Belltown? It happened to me just a couple of weeks ago.

Sure, it’s their candy store, and they can close whenever they feel like it, even if it’s bad for biz. No matter. I’ll know better next time and head straight to Jim and Joseph Buchanan’s hot new spot at Second and Lenora, where they serve a hearty brunch that keeps civilized Sunday hours, namely 11 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Yes ... must stop writing about *Alexandria’s* omelets, grits, waffles, peach cobbler ...

But there’s more to tell, and it might not be in season much longer. I applaud



Alberto’s Strawberry Lemon Drop, lovingly created by bar manager Alberto Maza. The plethora of cosmos and kazis has numbered us to the pleasures of

a real fruit drink; this one will awaken your senses. Starting with a base of Grey Goose vodka, Alberto adds fresh blueberries, fresh raspberries, fresh strawberries, a splash of sweet-&-sour mix, a splash of Cointreau and a splash of Chambord. He runs it through the blender and serves it in a giant, sugar-rimmed martini glass. Ambrosia. Nothing like it. It’s like test-driving a Maserati—you can go back to your Beamer, but you’ll always remember handling the Real Thing. No wonder Alberto was inducted into the Bar-tender Hall of Fame three years ago.

DINNER AT 8 is the name of a Master-

Card promotion slated for September. Sunday through Thursday nights at 32 restaurants around town, a three-course dinner is just \$20. Pay with your MasterCard and you get a half-pound of Caffé Vita coffee as well.

The most central of the three participating Belltown restaurants is *Axis*, which, as it happens, already offers an early-bird, three-course dinner for \$19.95. I’m a big



fan of their Happy Hour, which includes \$3 Blood Orange kamikazes and \$3 puttanesca pizza. I’d order the rotisserie chicken if I were dropping by for the dinner.

Another convenient option is *Rippe’s* on the waterfront at Pier 70. Known as Seattle’s “blue jeans” steakhouse, *Rippe’s* features a concoction called Frog On A Log that’s a filet steak inside a baked potato. It’s pretty good, actually.

To keep things orderly, the MasterCard promoters have folded Pike Place into Belltown. *Shea’s Lounge*, which Sandy Shea recently sold to Koichiro Ikawa, has a yummy menu. I’d recommend the carpaccio, wild salmon and orange panna cotta.

SO HOW MANY OF YOU WANDERED through Myrtle Edwards Park during Hemp-fest? The usual food vendors were out

hawking their wares: Gyro World, Big City Burrito, Parisi Bros. Calzone and the roasted corn booth. Anybody try the fare at *Hemp Heaven*?

Speaking of culinary adventures, I’m planning to do a tasting of Belltown’s various goat dishes at *Coco Tree*, *Casuelita’s*, *Lola’s*. Anywhere else? *Afrikando*, perhaps. Write me a note if you’d like to come along.

Tom and AnneMarie Hedges, wine growers from Issaquah, already have a chateau on Red Mountain near Benton City. Now they’ve got a condo at The Ellington as well. *Soyez les bienvenues à Belltown, mes amis*.

And a warm welcome back to Patricio and Eva, the amazing tango dancers who perform at *Buenos Aires Grill*. They were visiting relatives in Brazil over the summer.

CONGRATULATIONS ARE IN ORDER to Belltown’s top wine lists. The most recent issue of *Wine Spectator* commends *Assaggio*, *Brasserie Margaux*, *Campagne*, *Cascadia*, *El Gaucho*, *Flying Fish*, *Icon Grill*, *Queen City Grill*, *Waterfront* and *Zoë* in its annual “Award of Excellence” issue. Sure, some 3,000 restaurants nationwide get mentioned, and they have to cough up a couple hundred bucks to be considered. But hey, it’s still a useful measure of a restaurateur’s commitment to fine wine.

LET’S LOOK AT THE “GLASS HALF FULL” side of the *Subway* story.

I’ve never quite understood why *Subway* shops are allowed to desecrate the buildings they occupy with oversize signs, garish décor, hideous colors and ghastly lighting. (Don’t we have a Belltown neighborhood design review board? Doesn’t the city have standards?) Not to mention advertising that convinces the folks who eat there that the mediocre stuff they’re ingesting is healthy. To me, though, the worst offense is olfactory: *Subway* shops vent their ovens to the street, sending forth a disgusting odor of rancid fat, flour and yeast with all the subtlety of an overflowing outhouse. I suppose it might attract a starving basset hound or a drunken frat boy. “Duh ... Mongo smell food. Mongo hungry.”

However, and this is the good part, the

carbophobic Atkins whackos have forced the chain to adapt. *Subway* is serving more and more of its “sandwiches” as low-carb wraps, so they’re baking fewer loaves. At least that means there’s less foul aroma emanating from the *Subway* grates.

It still grates me, though, that Belltown has somehow spawned four-count ‘em four-*Subway* shops [I refuse to call them restaurants] at 3rd and Lenora, 2nd and Wall,



photos by Ronald

Western and Broad, and 1st and Denny. Plus we’re surrounded by an every-growing number of these storefront downtown, at Seattle Center and on Lower Queen Anne. Why can’t one of the franchisees open a decent photo parlor instead? ♦

Restaurant reviewer **Ronald Holden** welcomes news and comments from foodies and feeders alike. Seek more of him out at www.cornichon.org.

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