

Satisfying fare at new hoagie place downtown

EATERY NEAR SJSU SERVES HEFTY SANDWICHES

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In the little town where I went to college, the options for noshing outside of the dorm dining hall were pretty slim. Pizza, pizza and pizza pretty much summed up the culinary scene — if you could even call it that.

So I envy today's crop of San Jose State University students, who have an interesting and varied mix of close-to-campus casual restaurants and takeout places from which to choose — everything from the cool neighborhood bistro the Garage to the funky Peanuts coffee shop to the budget-but-tasty Supreme Dog. Oh, there's lots of pizza, too.

Into this eclectic mix has landed Hoagie Steak Out, a great little find in the quaint Victorian house at South Third and San Carlos streets that most recently was home to a skateboard shop (but has been a bunch of other things over the years, as well).

Climb the front stairs to what once was the home's parlor, place your order at the counter and take a seat at one of the eight tables or the many bar stools that cozy up to long countertops along two walls.

This is a menu for meat cravers who also adore big portions. Each Hoagie Steak Out sandwich could easily serve two — which makes this place a bargain for penny-pinching college students (and the rest of us, as well).

Hands down, our favorite at a recent lunch was the

Chicago pepperoni steak sandwich (\$6.25), a lusty blend of nicely grilled chopped steak, slightly spicy pepperoni, robust tomato sauce and creamy melted Provolone cheese. Like all the sandwiches here, it came on a grill-toasted French roll that is substantial enough to hold the load of fillings and yet soft enough to caress, not serrate, the roof of your mouth. That the beef is chopped also makes the sandwich easier to handle; don't you just hate the way the whole sandwich falls apart when you bite into most cheese steaks?

We also loved 3 Pepper Scarface (\$6.25), a tasty combo of chopped grilled steak, tomato, onions and American cheese, topped with Ortega chiles, pepper seeds and jalapeño slices. But beware: What starts out as merely mild turns quite warm indeed.

We asked for the Teriyaki Samurai to be made with chicken instead of beef (\$6.45, plus 90 cents for the substitution). This guilty pleasure melded delicious grilled chicken chunks with mushrooms, grilled onions and a Velveeta-like cheese (the guilty pleasure part) tossed in a mild teriyaki sauce.

The Superman Deluxe (\$6.75) is a sandwich built for a superhero. A mound of grilled steak nestles in the roll with grilled bell pepper, mushrooms, tomato sauce and Provolone. It was a messy thing to eat, but very satisfying.

We ordered the Rocky Philly (\$5.55) to take to a cheese steak-hound friend who was stuck at an all-day business retreat. She reported that its classic ingredients — grilled chopped steak, American cheese, grilled onions and mayonnaise — held up perfectly to be microwaved for her lunch the next day. (Note to Hoagie Steak Out: Can you get greener takeout containers? Styrofoam isn't Earth-friendly.)

Very good steak fries — nicely crisp on the outside, creamy on the inside — can be had for 90 cents as a

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side with a sandwich order or \$1.55 for a full order.

Make sure you pick up plenty of paper napkins. And don't skip the forks — you'll need them to scoop up all of the delicious fillings that will inevitably fall out of these generous sandwiches.

Contact Holly Hayes at hhayes@mercurynews.com or (408) 920-5374.

Hoagie Steak Out

304 S. Third St., San Jose. (408) 286-8811

Hours: 11 a.m.-9 p.m. daily, and until 10 p.m.

Wednesdays-Sundays.

Types of food: Cheese steak and hoagie sandwiches, fish and chips.

Average meal price: Around \$7.

Good choices: Chicago pepperoni cheese steak, Superman Deluxe, Rocky Philly.

Attitude: Friendly and super-efficient.

Amenities: Eight tables, and plenty of counter space with tall stools.

Vegetarian options: The Beautiful Veggie has bell peppers, mushrooms, lettuce, tomato, avocado and Provolone cheese.

Drinks: Fountain sodas (\$1.50; refills 50 cents each).

Eat in car: No way.

Next-day edibility: Surprisingly good.

Who goes there: San Jose State University students, downtown office workers, any meat-lover with a big appetite.

Credit cards: Yes.

Parking: On-street parking is metered; otherwise, there are several nearby garages.

Restaurant reviews are conducted anonymously.

The Mercury News pays for all meals.

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