

MCL Restaurant and Bakery is more than just a cafeteria

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By Alexis Larsen - Contributing Writer

There have been books written and studies done looking at the importance of food in socialization and celebration in societies around the world.

There also has been loads of research done on the fact that family time — including family meals — is currently in decline.



Getting in line at MCL Restaurant and Bakery starts with the salads. Contributed photo by Alexis Larsen

We're spending less time together, and when we do manage to gather to break bread, we are often out to lunch, buried in technology with little conversation happening.

So when you see a beautiful family of more than 30 people gather to celebrate the birthday of a spry 99-year-old, you stop and take notice for a wide variety of reasons. When you see multiple generations talking and engaged the entire time, and then when the entire dining room breaks into multiple happy birthday serenades, there's no doubt that you've come to a special place.

My husband likes to make fun of my love for MCL Restaurant and Bakery, but I love it unapologetically, for great moments like this and for the consistently good home-cooked variety it offers in an old-school meets new-school cafeteria atmosphere.

Founded in 1950 by Charles O. McGaughey and George Laughner (I had so hoped for entertainment value that MCL would stand for one of the acronyms found at <http://acronyms.thefreedictionary.com/MCL> — but it turns out it's an abbreviation of their last names), the chain locations can mostly be found throughout Indiana with a few in Ohio and Illinois.

Sometimes referred to as the "MediCare Lounge" — even by Wikipedia — thanks to a customer base that skews just a little bit older, it is a destination that offers comfortable

surroundings, affordably priced food and quality dishes that have been made from scratch.

The cafeteria line moves fairly quickly, and it's interactive once you get to the front, where you have your choice of salad, sides, main course, bread, dessert and drink.

The menu rotates, but the path to the register stays the same.

A large, bright display of tossed salads (\$1.99 or \$2.85), slaws (\$1.95), fresh fruit (\$2.39, \$3.59), fresh melon (\$2.09, \$2.89) and Jell-O (\$1.75 or \$1.99 with fruit) is the first stop. Choose as many as you like and then head on to your main course.

Options like a tender oven-roasted salmon (\$6.79), savory mushroom and Swiss chopped steak (\$5.89), tangy teriyaki chicken with rice (\$6.09) and carved roast beef (\$6.59) are just a few of the items that I have enjoyed while dining at MCL. I still have yet to see a vegetarian entree, but there are enough salads and sides to make quite a nice meal if meat isn't on your personal menu.

On a recent visit a half acorn squash (\$2.39) was available. It was absolutely delicious, roasted in the oven with cinnamon and butter, the fall flavors were put on display front and center and it would make a great centerpiece to a vegetarian meal.

Other sides include Mac and cheese (\$2.09), mashed potatoes, beets, carrots, spinach and corn (\$1.89 each). Sides also rotate throughout the week. There are a wide variety of bread choices to pair with your meal including a very tasty, light corn bread.

Whole homemade pies (\$10.75 - \$13.50) are available for purchase or there are a dozen varieties that can be purchased by the slice. Thursday is pie day, and you can get a slice for a deal at just 99 cents.

Each day of the week has a different \$3.99 daily feature, which is the best value by far — fried chicken on Sunday, stuffed chicken on Monday, roast beef on Tuesday, fried catfish on Wednesday, fried chicken on Thursday, chicken and noodles on Friday and meatloaf on Saturday.

And every Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, with the purchase of an adult entrée at regular menu price, your child's dinner is on MCL. The offer is valid for children 12 and younger and is available for dine in only. It's another really great value for families looking to stretch dollars.

Once you have paid in line, you take your tray to a table — if you need help, someone can carry it for you. There are servers who float throughout the restaurant refilling drinks and can grab anything you may have missed for you. Although tips are not required, my family always leaves something for the servers who have helped us.

As much as I love the home-cooked food, I equally love the atmosphere — especially the after-church crowd on Sundays.

The mom-and-pop feel of the restaurant combined with a crowd looking to socialize and visit over a good meal on any day of the week is something you don't see that often. Sometimes I think the restaurant's good vibes makes the food taste even better.

For some, the word cafeteria may conjure up visions of bland dishes that are served up on an assembly line, but this kind of cafeteria is homey, comfortable and family friendly. In fact, most of the offerings are nutritious and a good value for the money.

This isn't a restaurant that's going to set the world on fire, but it's consistently good, friendly and makes you feel like you're enjoying just a little bit of home while you're dining out. That and you can accommodate 30 people on the fly for a birthday if need be.

Dayton Eats looks at the regional food stories and restaurant news that make mouths water. Do you know of new exciting format changes, specials, happy hours, restaurant updates or any other tasty news you think is worth a closer look at? E-mail Alexis Larsen at alexis.e.larsen@hotmail.com with the information and we will work to include it in future coverage.

How to go

WHAT: MCL Restaurant and Bakery

WHERE: 4485 Far Hills Ave., Kettering

CATERING: MCL also offers carry-out (even for holidays) and corporate catering. Information on catering can be found at www.mclcatering.com/mcl-locations/dayton-kettering

MORE INFO: <http://mymclmeal.com> or (937) 299-6605

HOURS: **Open seven days a week from 11 a.m. to 8:30 p.m.**

DAYTON EATS

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