

CONTRA COSTA MarketPlace™

- December 2004 / RESTAURANT REVIEW by Carol Thompson

EXTREMELY GOOD PIZZA: EXTREME PIZZA IN HERCULES

C'mon, I had to say it, both for the pun and for the pizza. But it's true. One look at their menu, and you'll spend an "extreme" amount of time just trying to decide what to order. They cover the pizza base "extremely" well, and are smart marketers, too. Combination pizzas with names like "Holy Cow", "Green with Envy", "White Out" and "Kickin' Chicken" spice up the menu. It harkens me back to the days when the now-chain Erick's Deli, with all his hip names for sandwiches, was one little shop in Scott's Valley.

And the product is good, too. On a recent visit, I tried a sampler of the "indee" (8 inch) sized pizza. "Holy Cow" (\$5.95) ranked high on our list with its hip ingredients of fontina, swiss, gorgonzola, mozzarella, roasted walnuts and freshly cut sage. We also sampled "Green with Envy" (\$5.95). Another winner with homemade pesto sauce, sliced tomatoes, feta fresh basil, oregano, and mozzarella. But the menu doesn't stop there. In fact, it's the fault of most pizza places -- they just serve pizza. These guys have figured out the error of their ways and have included all kinds of good stuff: calzones, sandwiches (hot and cold), salads, chicken wings, even DESSERT!

Owners Paul and Mandy Dhillon have immersed themselves in the restaurant and the community. Paul has over 20 years of pizza and restaurant experience, and considers himself "half man, half pizza". His enthusiasm for pizza and people is almost palpable. They are hands-on operators, and feel its very important to be part of the daily business. "We are not absentee owners. It's very important to be in front of the customer and educate them on our products and services. We have such a diverse menu, a great product, and we reach out into the community to help make it a better place", says Paul. He adds, "we meet the customer where they are with good product and excellent service."

He is definitely doing something right, having catered 250 person functions on a regular basis, providing in-store meeting space with a laptop connection on a 80 inch projector, hosting school parties, and keeping many corporate accounts coming back again and again. They even offer a "deferred order" option so both you and they can plan ahead. Plus, they ingratiate themselves into the community by providing pizza for fund-raisers and supporting community groups where they can.

Marketing is something Paul and the chain seem to be very savvy about. They seem to have the pulse of what people want, and deliver a product with up-to-the-minute ingredients and smart marketing to get the word out.

The Dhillons are proud of their team as well: managers Craig Jensen and William Bucholz, and Head Chef Oswaldo Garcia help the restaurant run smooth. And they're local - Paul has been in Hercules 22 years, married Mandy in 2001 and has a 20-month old daughter (Mehek). He and his wife are expecting another child in March.

So help support a nice, enthusiastic local guy that happens to make "extremely" good pizza.

Extreme Pizza, 3700 San Pablo Ave. (near Starbucks), Hercules, 510-964-9990.

