



Authentically Irish

BY ANGELA E. THOMAS • PHOTOGRAPHY BY JENNIFER FREEMAN

Genuinely Delightful

WHEN THE OWNERS OF CREGEEN'S DUBBED THE PUB IRISH, THEY WEREN'T KIDDING. The furniture, bric-a-brac, wood, bars ... virtually everything used to build the establishment — including the carpenters — came from Ireland. J. B. Williams, Jason Fallis and Stephen McNay, owners/partners, traveled the world over and loved the atmosphere and concept of the Irish pub.

“Pub is short for public house,” Williams said. “In Ireland, the pub changes throughout the day. So does Cregeen’s.” At lunch, the diners are business people; at dinner, families; and in the evenings, couples. “Pubs aren’t like typical American restaurants. In Europe, people camp out. It’s not uncommon for people in Europe to sit at communal tables. It’s a more social setting.”

Jameson stained glass was used in the front door, and the bar is Victorian. The coffins — the boxes on the bar — are traditional and are used to serve beer. The snug at the end of bar — a private, semi-open dining area — is also an homage to tradition.

The authenticity of the pub extends to the menu. Their brunch menu includes Guinness beef stew and Guinness onion soup. The lunch menu includes Irish Boxy Farthing, a traditional Irish potato pancake served with sour cream and chives ... tasty. You’ll also find Corned Beef and Cabbage; Bangers and Mash; Shepherd’s Pie; and Fish and Chips. We tried the latter four.

“We have the best fish and chips in the United States as far as I’m concerned,” said Khalil Moussa, general manager. He hosts Tuesday Tastings; it’s a multi-course meal, and just like a wine dinner, each course is paired with a beer or whiskey, based on the time of year.

The first dish we tasted was the corned beef and cabbage. The corned beef was offered cubed and braised; the cabbage was prepared to just the right consistency and served with delicious garlic mashed potatoes. The

same potatoes are used to top the Shepherd’s Pie, a generous portion of well-seasoned meat served with a fresh salad. Banger and Mash is an unfamiliar dish. “We use classic, real bangers. It’s one of our best-selling dishes,” Williams said. Bangers are mild sausages; the meat is finely ground giving them the consistency of a hot dog; however, the taste is a far cry from even the finest hot dog. The fish and chips is a more-than-generous filet of cod, harp lager battered and deep-fried. It’s crisp on the outside, heavenly on the inside and accompanied by pub fries and coleslaw, the menu declares it a pub classic; you will too. Save room for dessert. You’ll want to try a serving of the bread pudding. We were fortunate. The day we visited, Moussa prepared chocolate bread pudding, using a recipe from Sharon Priest, executive director, The Downtown Partnership. It’s a chocoholic’s dream. We also sampled the chocolate crême brulee; again, it was a winner.

What is a pub without beer? The Irish are known for fine Guinness, and as an Irish pub, Cregeen’s must live up to this reputation. “We are the only bar in Arkansas that pours a proper pint,” Williams said. “Most beer has CO2. Stouts use nitrogen. We use a two-part pour.”

Moussa said, “It takes 1 minute and 23 seconds to pour a proper pint of Guinness.” Williams nodded. “We tell customers: don’t wait until your glass is empty. We may not offer the most beers,” he said. “But Cregeen’s has the freshest and best selection of beer around.”

Visit Cregeen’s; you’ll find the food, service, atmosphere and drinks pleasing every time. Check the Web site for special events and information about live music.

Cregeen’s Irish Pub, 301 Main St., North Little Rock, AR 72114, (501) 376-PINT, cregeens.com; brunch, Sun. 11 to 3 p.m., lunch: Mon. through Sat. 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.; dinner: Sun. 3 to 10 p.m., Mon. through Wed. and Sat. 3 p.m. to 1 a.m., Thu. and Fri. 3 p.m. to 2 a.m. ■