

October 29, 2009

Demos' celebrate 20 years with one-day menu rollback specials

Wouldn't it be wonderful if the price of a meal out at a restaurant was the same today as it was 20 years ago?

Well, if you want to order the hamburger steak at <http://www.demosrestaurants.com/>> Demos' restaurants, that's just what you'll get — that's right, the "ground daily, hand formed" 10-ounce hamburger steak that was on the original 1989 menu for \$6.95 is still there at the very same price — and size — 20 years later at all five Demos' locations.

Admittedly, most everything else on the menu has crept up a little bit over the past two decades. To celebrate their 20th anniversary, Demos' will offer 1989 prices for one day at each location.

I have to say that Demos' owners, Jim and Doris Demos, have done an impressive job of keeping their menu affordable in spite of all of the economic challenges and pressures facing the sit-down dining industry over these two decades.

"We have always wanted to be affordable," said Jim, who said his pricing theory was akin to that of J.C. Penney, who once said he would "rather make a fast nickel instead of a slow dime."

And a fast nickel it is for the family-owned and operated Demos' chain, with lots of table turns and loyal repeat customers who know a bargain when they see — or should I say taste — one.

Most of us cheapos know that Demos' has one of the best cheap lunches around — a \$4.25 weekday lunch special that includes a pasta entree, salad or soup and their yummy bread. They often use their lunch specials to test out new menu items, too. This week it's chili chicken nachos and next week it's pizza sausage spaghetti.

You can tell by the full parking lots and lunch lines that people are drawn to these deals.

A telling story was that last year when the Demos' made the difficult decision to increase the lunch special from \$3.99 to \$4.25, instead of being upset, many customers were sympathetic and supportive. Jim recalls one customer saying, "I don't know why you have not done this before."

Here are a few things I learned over my \$4.25 pasta lunch with Jim and Doris:

- Everything on the menu except the desserts and the French and low-fat dressings are made in-house from scratch from Demos family recipes — some from Jim's Greek heritage and some from Doris' family.
- Eighty percent of their lunch menu is priced under \$7, and 70 percent of their dinner menu is under \$10 all the time. The average per-person ticket at lunch is \$6-\$6.50 and dinner is around \$10.
- The children's menu for the 10-and-under crowd has lots of choices for \$2.99 that include a soft drink and soup or salad.
- Most of the Demos' locations have a wait almost every day at lunch and dinner, but the line moves fairly quickly or you can eat in the bar most days with no wait.
- If it's your birthday, be sure to tell them because they'll bring you a free piece of nice chocolate cake with a candle and take your picture for you to take home.

- The baked chicken soup is Jim's grandmother's secret concoction. Don't even ask him for the recipe, but when you consider that they serve up to 5,000 gallons of it a month, you should figure it's pretty darn tasty. "If we took the soup off, we'd be run out of town," Doris said.
- Consider take-out. Demos' sells lots of soup to-go — especially in flu season. But they also do a brisk "pan" business, where you can order a choice of foil pan entrée for six to eight people (choices include Greek chicken and pasta, meat sauce pasta, blackened chicken pasta, lasagna, etc.) for \$36, including bread and either soup or salad and fresh Parmesan cheese.
- Customer response cards are not only read daily, but they're plastered on the refrigerator for all of the employees to see.
- The bar is a very small part of the Demos' business at just 3 to 6 percent of the total, but prices are less than a lot of places — a glass of house wine is \$4.25 and domestic beer is \$3.50.
- Demos' is truly a family business. Jim is the overall leader, Doris is in charge of customer service, son Peter is president and daughter Felicia manages the financial side.

Congratulations on
20 years of serving good affordable food. Stay cheap!

Additional Facts

If you go

To celebrate their 20 years in business, the Demos' are offering one-day menu rollback specials where you can order from the 1989 menu at 1989 prices. Today the special is being offered at the Hendersonville Demos'; on Sunday, it's the Demos' in downtown Nashville; on Monday, it's the original Murfreesboro location; Nov. 5 it's at the Florence, Ala., restaurant; and Nov. 12 at Demos' in Lebanon.

"When we looked at our original menu we saw that virtually every item is still on our current menu," said Jim, noting that it seemed appropriate to celebrate by giving customers a price break and highlighting the fact that the Demos family recipes have held their own so well.

More information about the 20th anniversary is available at www.demosrestaurants.com
