

BROADNECK GRILL & CANTINA II

Thrives in New Neighborhood!

By Mary Lou Baker
Photography by Tony Lewis, Jr.

Broadneck Grill & Cantina
Edgewater Village Center, 74 Central Avenue West, Edgewater
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Broadneckgrill.com

Geographical correctness aside, Broadneck Grill & Cantina shows signs of succeeding as the go-to neighborhood restaurant in a section of Edgewater that has been transformed from farmland to new condos and strip malls. Open since June, 2014, this little sister to the original restaurant of the same name in Cape St. Claire does a lot more than offer bottomless bloody Mary's or mimosas with Sunday brunch, a menu with a distinct Mexican accent and monthly wine dinners. Add to that multiple TVs in the bar and adjoining dining room, a flickering faux fireplace embedded in a brick wall and a friendly vibe from staff who appear to love their jobs.

There's lots to like about this pleasant little place, where a black-clad corps of servers move like dancers around the windowed dining-drinking space. Our initial visit was for breakfast (served weekends only) and we arrived mid-morning to find the restaurant filled with folks of all ages. With a busy day ahead, we skipped the long list of specialty drinks (10 different martinis, multiple margarita variations) and a short wine list. Feeling obliged to sample "Our Famous Sangria," I did—but found it strangely sweet and after a few sips left it lingering in its garnish of fruit slices and a maraschino cherry.

Fresh-squeezed orange juice and ice water garnished with lemon proved better choices and the coffee was strong and good. In addition to an innovative menu featuring riffs on Mexican favorites, omelets, and eggs Benedict, breakfast specials that Sunday included creamed chipped beef over buttermilk biscuits, a vegetable sausage quiche (spinach, mushrooms, cheese, sausage, and ham—the meat's optional in a nod to vegetarians), and sweet potato pancakes with cranberries and maple syrup. Hard to whittle the choices down to two when "everything looks good" in the colorful food photos decorating the menu.



But we ruthlessly eliminated blueberry pancakes, create-your-own omelet options, and a loaded chimichanga in favor of "Brunch Quesadillas" and a dish dubbed "The Big French Breakfast." My quesadillas were presented as six small triangles of tortillas stuffed with bacon, eggs, and cheese on an oval white platter garnished with a swirl of sour cream, a scoop of creamy guacamole, and impeccably fresh pico de gallo. This





popular Mexican condiment (not to be confused with the more widely-known salsa) is a south-of-the-border salad of chopped tomatoes and onions in a garlicky dressing of lime juice and cilantro. Broadneck Grill makes a perfect version that made the simple quesadillas special.

While my brunch was light and lovely, my companion's hearty appetite led him to "The Big French Breakfast," with its promise of house-made French toast, and two each of pancakes, bacon, link sausages, and eggs cooked to order. While not raving over the pancakes ("too heavy") he was moderately pleased.

A higher level of satisfaction came on a follow up visit, when our threesome dined sumptuously on a special of slow-roasted lamb shank, sizzling steak fajitas, and a broccoli-cheese burrito. The lamb shank—a Sunday dinner special—is a personal favorite that seemed out of place at a Mexican cantina so I had to try it. Meat on the massive bone was fork tender, flavored by its marinade and crested with roasted red peppers, onions, and flecks of cilantro. Black beans (made in house) and rice rich with the tomato-flavored ranchero sauce were ideal companions for the rich meat.

Best of show on our second visit were New York strip steak fajitas, the meat perfectly grilled to medium rare and piled on a sizzling skillet with chopped tomatoes and onions. The presentation, which included a round wooden box of steamy hot flour tortillas and a serving

plate of Mexican rice and black beans garnished with the restaurant's signature pico de gallo, guacamole, and sour cream combo, demonstrated the kitchen's ability to showcase its skills in a variety of ways.

The vegetarian in our party politely questioned our server (asking if the beans were cooked with meat broth/answer was no/restaurant makes their beans from scratch) before ordering a broccoli and cheese burrito. (Incidental Intelligence: The name is Spanish for "little donkey" because the shape of a burrito resembles the bed rolls transported on the animal's back by travelers.) Details aside, she was pleased with the vegetable that arrived with its cheese topping still in the melting state.

Broadneck Grill does several things worth noting, among them the kitchen's farm-to-table practices that makes "vegetables of the day" (on our visit broccoli, cauliflower, and carrots) a regular part of the menu and their fabulous house-made desserts. There is one practice that management should reconsider, and that is charging \$3.50 for corn chips and salsa. With that caveat, I can confidently recommend this above-average cantina as a place to sample the Mexican and American dishes prepared by talented chef Guillermo Diaz.



Enlightened management by owner Donna Duran is responsible for the 20-year lifespan of her Broadneck Grill I—and the same attention to detail is evident at her newest venture. ♦

Mary Lou Baker is a frequent contributor to *What's Up?* Media publications and self-professed gourmand. She has authored numerous culinary articles and recently penned the book *Seafood Lover's Chesapeake Bay: Restaurants, Markets, Recipes & Traditions*.

