

DINING OUT

The Boston Globe

Czech pub fare adds life to Lynn

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Gulu-Gulu Café

56 Central Square, Lynn

617-848-5967

www.gulu-gulu.com

Hours: Monday-Wednesday, 10 a.m.-9 p.m.; Thursday-Saturday, 10 a.m.-11 p.m.; closed Sunday

Major charge cards

A few short years ago, it would have been hard to visualize anybody opening a café in Lynn that served Czechoslovakian pub food, and gave diners the option of dozens of wines and beers, along with free WiFi access to the Internet.

But condominiums and gentrification have come to Lynn, and along the way the wave brought Steve Feldmann. He and his wife, Marie, who met in a Prague café called the Gulu-Gulu, bought a loft in downtown Lynn a couple of years ago.

After failing to find a place where locals could sit and have a sandwich and a drink, they decided to start their own restaurant. Feldmann quit his job as a website designer, and last year paid homage to the Prague haunt by naming a former church storefront, steps from their loft, the Gulu-Gulu Café.

Inside, jazz from Feldmann's iPod washes over the exposed brick walls, adorned with surreal paintings by local artists. The restaurant has the feel of a loft, complete with mismatched tables, a bookshelf stocked with Stephen King novels, and a couple of couches that offer patrons the chance to relax while they sip an espresso or a merlot.

On a recent night, we stopped by just before a showing of "Nosferatu." We enjoyed the mint hot chocolate (\$2.50), served in a gigantic cup and topped with chocolate sauce. Once we were sufficiently warm, we decided to sample the 16-ounce banana-pineapple smoothie (\$3.50). This drink was thick, sweet, and filling.

We moved on to the Sopsky Salat (\$7), essentially a Czech version of a Greek salad. Doused with olive oil, it's a generous bowl of cucumbers, tomatoes, green peppers, black olives, red onions, and feta cheese. We found it fresh and filling.

We also sampled the grilled portobello mushrooms (\$7.50), mixed with sun-dried tomatoes and goat cheese. This is a hearty dish, and the mushrooms were grilled perfectly.

We stuck with warm paninis for the entrees, and were not disappointed. The Lyon vegetarian (\$7) was filled with tomatoes, artichoke hearts, and roasted red peppers, with melted provolone. The Viennese (\$7) was a fine blend of fresh mozzarella, tomatoes, and fresh basil. The Stockholm (\$7) was stuffed with white tuna, Swiss cheese, and tomatoes.

Feldmann believes the Gulu-Gulu's future is tied to the growth of downtown Lynn. With lofts driving the downtown economy, Feldmann expects his bistro to succeed. To date over 200 condos have been sold downtown, and there are plans to build hundreds more.

Years from now, the Gulu-Gulu could be known as the restaurant that brought a new hipness to once-dead Central Square.

Throughout the day, new condo owners seek refuge in the Gulu's deep couches; lunch guests retrieve their e-mail between bites.

At night, the restaurant takes on the feel of a wine bar. Also, each night there's a different event planned -- with

movies, open mikes, jazz bands, live theater, and poetry slams during the week. North Shore diners who have long sought a Czech experience now have the Gulu.

STEVEN ROSENBERG ■