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Eclectic sandwich selection

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ALGONQUIN – Sometimes the high-speed Internet is forced to play catch-up with the slow-and-steady pace of suburban life.

Consider the Algonquin Sub Shop.

A local mainstay for nearly 15 years, the tiny sub shop on Filip Street, south of the intersection of routes 31 and 62, counts families, couples and businesspeople among its customers.

Algonquin resident Susan McCabe and Becky Conigliaro of Lake in the Hills chatted at a table on a recent afternoon while their kids scooted around outside, their mouths stained with giant candies from a quarter machine inside the shop.

Both women said they had been customers for years.

“The food is terrific,” McCabe said.

But in recent times it also has become a hit with Internet foodie bloggers who highlight niche dishes and hard-to-find ingredients for equally discerning members of the blogosphere.

Gemma Petrie, the Chicago-based author of the ProBonoBaker.Typepad.com blog, posted close-ups of her sandwich.

“It has been about 7 years since I ordered my first sandwich here and I still get the same thing – the Where’s Waldorf: crisp apples, grilled green bell peppers, toasted walnuts, spinach, melted brie cheese and Vidalia onion dressing,” Petrie wrote. “Be sure to eat it warm in order to fully appreciate the messy, gooey brie.”

Yahoo Local and Yelp.com reviewers have also had a field day with the restaurant.

“This is the greatest sub shop in the world,” wrote one.

“I’ve tried subs from Tallahassee to Chatanooga and nothing comes close,” wrote another.

A reviewer on Gapersblock.com was almost prayerful: “Oh lord, I want one right now.”

The reason the Algonquin business succeeds with both Internet gourmets and local residents is its menu, according to owner John Ryals.

The Algonquin Sub Shop teems with unique choices.

“I think that is the key,” Ryals said. “You’re not going to see the sandwiches anywhere else.”

Ryals only offers original or wheat versions for the toasted sub bread, but the insides vary widely. The bestselling “Al Capone” uses traditional Italian lunch meats and provolone.

But the “Texas Chili Rub” includes char-grilled marinated pork tenderloin, mild green chilis, melted pepperjack and chipotle mayo.

Conigliaro, a California native, said she became a regular after discovering the “Gobbler” sandwich offered the very California turkey-avocado combination.

“It’s all about the creativity,” Ryals said.

Ryals opened his restaurant after quitting a corporate career he hated and signing up to work with Yoshi Katsumura, owner of the upscale, eclectic Yoshi’s Cafe in Chicago.

Word-of-mouth reviews have always been the shop’s chief marketing tool.

“The response I get here is so positive,” Ryals said.

Ryals said one customer was unhappy with a mix-up at the shop one day and vowed never to return, but employees became suspicious when different people came asking for his particular order. Ryals phoned the customer, and he’s been

It’s a “very very loyal” clientele, Ryals said. “Everything we do is top of the line.”

The profit margin is slimmer than it could be if he dropped the quality and cost of the sandwich components, he said.

About three months ago he had to raise the price on his sandwiches, each is still \$7.25 or less, and heard not a peep from his customers, he said.

“So I’m going to \$19 bucks a sub,” he joked.