

Fairest of All—Phoenix's Chestnut Lane is like a foodie fairytale come to life

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Complete with bakery cases showcasing seven-layer cakes, bright pink lemonade and wicker baskets full of pretty parchment-wrapped sandwiches.



Itty bitty jars holding a single bloom. White walls and mismatched chairs. Daily specials written on butcher paper. In addition to delicious baked goods and some of the Valley's best summertime salads, Phoenix's year-old Chestnut Lane dishes up charm in spades.

Chef and owner of Chestnut Lane, Polly Levine, has always been a lover of food and having her own eatery was a long-time dream. Now, she is sharing her incredible recipes with Phoenixians at the popular Chestnut Lane, where diners pack the small parking lot for a casual counter-service breakfast, lunch and to-go items. In addition to the delightful, no-frills atmosphere, diners consistently return for from-scratch cooking made mostly of local, organic and high-caliber ingredients.

Though the breakfast menu is limited, quality over quantity applies to Chestnut Lane. The cutely named Green Eggs and Ham dish is as beautiful as it is delicious: fresh handfuls of arugula rest on top of a perfectly poached egg, a few slices of prosciutto and a thick slice of buttermilk toast. The delightful lemon-poppy seed waffles were a daily special during our visit (in the fall, this dish makes way for pumpkin waffles). Though the warm blueberries and fresh whipped cream that serve as toppings are hard to pass up, the waffles certainly don't need them. The subtly flavored waffles, which are topped with a dusting of confectioner's sugar, are more like light, moist slices of cake.

For a breakfast on the go, Chestnut Lane offers plenty of pastries and house-made granola. The blueberry-cornmeal cake is a fitting option for those who don't enjoy supersweet morning treats. (Those who love cornbread will also adore this selection.) The blueberries are the star of the cake—their vivid fruity flavor shines through without a hint of artificial flavor. The sour cherry scone is a best-seller, and we could taste why. Never mind hard, dense store-bought scones; this scone is deliciously moist and airy with bright bursts of cherry and a crispy, sugar-coated crust.

Business starts to boom around noontime—also about the time the parking lot situation becomes a tad thorny. We suggest getting there before noon or after 1 p.m. to avoid the crowds. If you do get stuck in line, though, the food is definitely worth the wait. For a light lunch, you can't go wrong with the kale salad or the Chestnut Lane chopped salad. (They pair nicely with the cafe's sandwich selection as well, as you can do a half-sandwich, small-salad order.) The organic kale is mixed with currants, pine nuts, Parmigiano-Reggiano and lemon vinaigrette while the chopped salad has bits of corn, tomatoes, avocado, cucumber, feta, toasted pepitas and chicken breast. Both blends are fresh and flavorful—perfect for the warm summer months.

While the grilled cheese sandwich and the turkey BLT are traditional, they are far from forgettable. The BLT boasts house-roasted turkey and applewood-smoked bacon while the grilled cheese is smothered with aged Vermont cheddar. The ficelle sandwiches (ficelle is a long, thin loaf of French bread), beautifully wrapped in parchment paper and tied up with twine, is a convenient option for busy lunchers. Chestnut Lane offers two ficelle options: the prosciutto with brie and the locally smoked salmon with cream cheese and dill.

Just like breakfast at Chestnut Lane, lunchtime should end with a sweet treat. The hard part is choosing which to indulge in. Our favorites are the pecan bars and the seven-layer caramel cake. The pecan bars are crunchy, with a bit of finger-licking gooeyness. The caramel cake is almost too good to be true—it offers seven thin layers of painstakingly baked cake (each layer is in the oven for precisely six minutes) with not-too-sweet caramel cream in between. It only makes sense that they can't bake and stock these mmm-worthy masterpieces fast enough, according to Levine. Plus, the cafe's shelves are stashed with to-go baggies of homemade cookies, caramels, toffees and more.

The best way to wash down the decadent caramel cake (and just about anything on the menu) is with the blackberry lemonade. If there was a perfect summer sip, we're pretty sure it would be this sweet-and-tart drink. It certainly makes 100-degree days a bit more delicious.

TAKE NOTE:

Chestnut Lane

4225 E. Camelback Rd., Phoenix.

602.535.5439, www.chestnutlanecafe.com.

Chef: Polly Levine.

Hours: Tuesday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.; Saturday, 8 a.m. to 1 p.m.