

## Customers delight in raw deal at Borrowed Earth

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BY THOMAS WITOM

Borrowed Earth Cafe, a vegan-oriented raw food restaurant that opened in late 2007 in Downers Grove, probably won't turn most lifelong carnivores away from meat and dairy products.

But visitors to the casual eatery run by Danny and Kathy Living, a congenial, laid-back husband-and-wife team, are assured of getting a satisfying meal and coming away with a new appreciation of the raw food concept.

Housed in a strip mall in the heart of town, Borrowed Earth has no oven on the premises. This circumstance, far from hampering the kitchen, has challenged it to innovate and consider alternatives in its quest to deliver tasty, healthful fare.

The spinach-artichoke dip goes down easy. The vegetables were pureed with macadamia nuts and a hint of lemon juice and accompanied by crispy flat flax-carrot crackers for dipping.

For a main course, two tasty specials (each \$14.95) filled the bill on a recent Saturday night.

"Lasagna" came with an enjoyable cashew "cheese," mushrooms and zucchini noodles. Equally good was the zucchini-covered Thai Wrap, which was given a subtly sweet accent by a mango-cucumber sauce topping. It was plated with a cauliflower "couscous" that got its colorful golden hue from turmeric. The dishes only loosely resembled their namesake. However, when each was judged on its own merits, none was found wanting.

Various side salads -- dandelion, asparagus and cabbage -- further enhanced the meal, with dill and other fresh herbs adding flavor.

Another popular appetizer offering is the dolmas, featuring garlic, lemon, pine nuts and jicama "rice" seasoned with currants and wrapped in a grape leaf.

Among entree selections are a walnut-carrot-based Earth Burger and Planet Pizza, made with a sprouted-rye crust covered with marinara sauce, mushrooms, tomatoes and almond ricotta "cheese."

Diners seated at high-top tables have a good view of the open kitchen but also can monitor progress of their food orders via an overhead television screen focused directly on the prep area.

Entree portions are far from skimpy, so one might tend to lose sight of dessert -- a big mistake. The banana, almond and cherry chocolate chunk "ice cream," sweetened with agave nectar, was sinfully appealing. And enthusiasm over the homemade chocolate cheesecake, made from cocoa and cashews with a nut-based crust, was well-deserved. Don't be surprised if a recyclable "doggy box" with remnants of the cake follow you home. How often do you get to say, "I ate all my vegetables but didn't have room for dessert"?

Thomas Witom is a local free-lance writer.