

Dinner Date

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Folksy, friendly Vince's North Port has great seafood, decent prices

How many restaurants can you think of publish its own newsletter? Good thing Vince's North Port Restaurant does. Somehow, this charming North Market eatery has fallen under our radar during its five-year existence, until we received a copy of the North Port News — the inaugural edition — recently.

It updated patrons on the restaurant's renovations ("we have added a parking area behind the building. Use the driveway on the left") and notes new menu items and specials (headline: "Onion rings back by popular demand"). It also gives thanks to customers, friends and neighbors, even wishing a few of them a happy birthday.

(From the onion rings story: "one North Highland's teacher said she needed them for medicinal purposes after a tough day in the classroom. We can not confirm any scientific proof of the medicinal affects of our onion rings, but we're not taking any chances!")

The newsletter was so entertaining we had to try the restaurant. And we're glad we did.

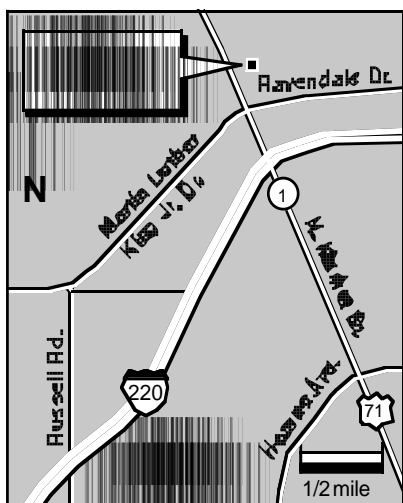
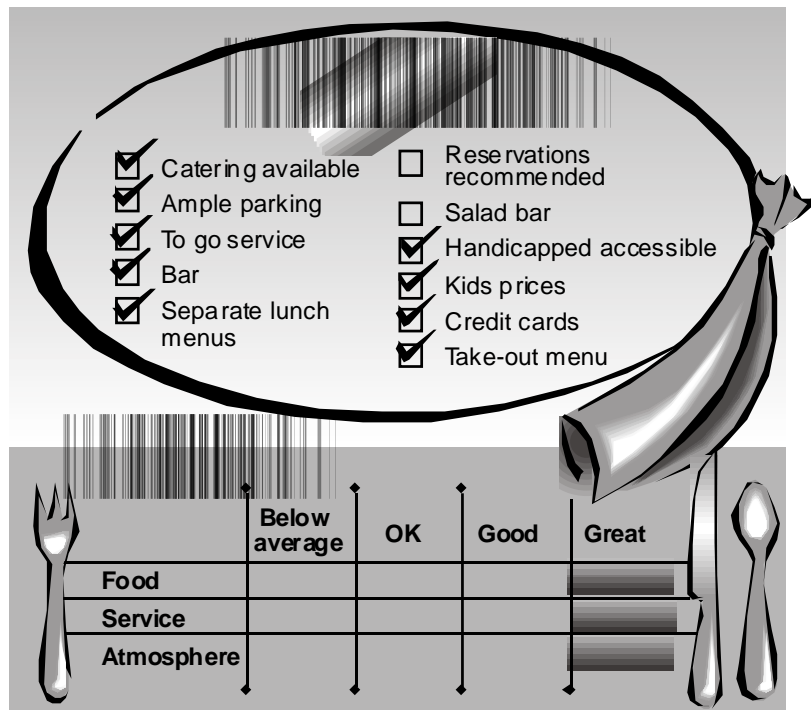
Located on North Market just past I-220, Vince's has a very open and inviting dining room, with a great mural on the wall keeping with its nautical theme (and cleverly disguising the walk-in freezer). The dining room was recently expanded to enlarge its no-smoking section, along with eight new booths (as reported in the North Port News).

The staff was incredibly friendly, which helped soothe our disappointment when a few of the items on the seafood-heavy menu weren't in stock.

For a starter, we got some great raw oysters, opting against the resurgent onion rings. Vince's also has a neat little bar area, and brags on having "the coldest mugs in town;" one of these days we'll have to take in a football game over Vince's onion rings and a few cold mugs of beer.

The dinner menu offers an array of steaks, chicken and seafood, either broiled, grilled or fried, along with sandwiches and pasta dishes as well. Everything sounded great, and it literally took 15 minutes to make up our minds.

(A separate lunch menu has sandwiches, burgers, seafood dinners and daily plate lunch specials Mon-



The Times

VINCE'S NORTH PORT RESTAURANT

Address: 3142 North Market St.

Phone: 424-1377.

Hours: 9 a.m. to 9 p.m.
Mon.-Thurs.; 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. Fri.-Sat.

Prices: Inexpensive to moderate

potato, they weren't kidding; this thing was loaded to the hilt with cheese, bacon and chopped onions.

We left as very "stuffed" patrons, wondering how this place remained a secret from us for five years. Well, the secret's out now. For great food in a friendly atmosphere, Vince's really scores.

On the Menu

Among the items featured on the menu at Vince's North Port Restaurant are: topless oysters, \$6.95 per dozen; fried green tomatoes (in season), \$3.95; onion rings, \$5.95; shrimp & grits, \$8.95; seafood medley, \$10.95; crabmeat au gratin, \$10.95; three-item seafood combo, \$14.95; shrimp scampi, \$8.95; whole muffedetta, \$12.95.

Dinner Date is a weekly anonymous restaurant review. The Times pays for all meals. Negative results are based on at least two visits.

day through Friday.)

On our nighttime visit, the crabmeat au gratin was an early choice, but they were out, so we went with something similar, the seafood medley from Vince's list of specialties. It was a generous portion of shrimp, scallops and crab in a rich cream sauce, and was terrific. It came with warm, buttery bread that was perfect for sopping up the sauce.

Our other entree was a triple combo from the fryer; fried shrimp, stuffed shrimp and fried catfish. All were great, the fried shrimp a standout, butterflied in a really crispy batter. Also, bonus points for the tartar and cocktail sauce, both of which were really good.

Both meals came with choice of potato, and when they say "stuffed"