

# Callahan's Siskiyou Lodge

**V**alentine's Day may be a clichéd excuse for an above-average meal, a piece of jewelry or a dozen roses from that special someone.

For my husband and I, it was an incentive for a weekend getaway to Callahan's Siskiyou Lodge. The secluded lodge, cradled at the base of Mount Ashland, fits the bill for such an occasion with its snowy vistas, rustic atmosphere and fireside dining.

A week shy of Valentine's Day, Sean and I had hoped to avoid the crowds of couples bent on a romantic experience. Nonetheless, the lodge's restaurant was bustling. Fortunately, we had reservations and promptly were seated adjacent to a warm, crackling fire and near a small stage, where guitarist Ken Hart played easy-listening hits. Callahan's rich, wood paneling, knotty juniper tables and large windows, overlooking the surrounding woods, require little additional embellishment, and dim lighting completes the idyllic ambiance.

In December, Christopher Kempf replaced Brandon Cunningham as executive chef at Callahan's. (Cunningham left to attend culinary school.) With the help of sous chef William Shine, Kempf modified the menu to maintain the familiarity of entrees while improving the food's

quality and flavor.

Kempf added several vegetarian options, including a stuffed portobello cap and Mediterranean eggplant, which he promises will appeal to vegetarians and carnivores alike. He also altered several sauces to better complement the dishes, for example, replacing a mustard-cream sauce with a lighter lemon-butter sauce, a better match for tender, pan-seared scallops.

Kempf also recently instituted a dry-age process for all beef. Meat is hung for 14 to 21 days allowing moisture to evaporate, breaking down the tough sinews and resulting in a more tender, flavorful steak.

Famished after an afternoon of snowshoeing, Sean and I briefly appeased our hunger with prime-rib crostini (\$12): thin shavings of prime rib and crumbled blue cheese on toasted bread slices, drizzled with a balsamic-vinegar gastrique. Other enticing

## Word of Mouth

Dining out with  
the Mail Tribune

Callahan's Siskiyou Lodge  
7100 Old Highway 99 South,  
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Open 4:30 to 9 p.m. Monday through  
Thursday and 8 to 11 a.m. for breakfast,  
11 a.m. to 4 p.m. for lunch and 4 to  
10 p.m. for dinner Friday through Sunday.  
View menus at [www.callahanslodge.com](http://www.callahanslodge.com).

appetizers include baked brie, Maryland-style crab dip and prawn cocktails.

Sean ordered a medium-rare sirloin with fries (\$27). I read each listing carefully before settling on wild salmon (\$26). Other noteworthy entrees and candidates for a second visit include rigatoni Bolognese, slow-roasted duck breast with

blood-orange gastrique, wild-mushroom salad and the previously touted Mediterranean eggplant filled with olive tapenade, goat cheese and spinach.

All entrees are served with signature house salads and fresh, cracked-wheat bread, a recipe perfected by Callahan's owner Ron Bergquist. Sean had nothing but compliments for the house salad, a mix of winter greens bathed in a housemade pear vinaigrette and garnished with a handful of hazelnuts and thin slices of pear.

My meal was a good blend of flavors and textures from the subtle essence

of the lemon-dill beurre blanc that permeated the tender pink flakes of salmon to the creamy, warm mushroom risotto. Both Sean and my meal came with a stir-fry of seasonal vegetables.

Sean cut into his sirloin to discover it was far too rare for his taste. Fortunately, the waiter noticed this error and returned it to the kitchen for additional cooking. Meanwhile, he munched on his fries. No ketchup was necessary. The potatoes, seasoned with truffle oil, could stand on their own.

For dessert, we ordered Cunningham's famous chocolate torte, which won first place at the 2010 Oregon Chocolate Festival. The dense torte was finished with a dark chocolate-chili ganache and served on a bed of black cherry compote.

The spicy aftertaste haunted my palate long after the dessert was gone, leaving me pining for a cup of coffee or a glass of cold milk. Those who favor a sweet-spicy combination should look no further. However, for Sean and I, we might prefer the tirimisu, baked banana split or berry cobbler for a return visit.

Callahan's will host a Sweetheart Ball from 4 to 10 p.m. on Valentine's Day, complete with live music by the Robbie DaCosta Band and an exclusive Valentine's menu. There is a \$10 cover charge per couple.

—Teresa Thomas