

HAVE YOU READ THE NEWS?

CHICAGO SUN-TIMES

**CUZZIN'S**  
Italian Comfort Food

## “Italian Comfort Food deliciously lives up to its name”

said Food Critic Pat Bruno in the **FRIDAY, MARCH 24, Chicago Sun-Times**

A couple of years back, I did a review on these pages of Danny's, a very casual Italian restaurant at 16th and Division in Melrose Park. I went on and on about the “red gravy,” the neckbone gravy, the eggplant Parmigiana, and more. Well, wouldn't you know, that review started the meatballs a-rolling, to the point where some of the fancier food shows on TV and this channel and that channel jumped on the bandwagon. And there goes the neighborhood. Danny's in Melrose Park is still a fine place to spool some pasta, but now there are a couple of Danny's offshoots that go by the name Cuzzin's. One is in Orland Park, the other in Des Plaines. For the record, I don't even know if there is a Danny (or some cousin) involved in all of this. But I do know this: if you are in the mood for some down-and-delicious Italian food, Cuzzin's has a menu that is chock-full. What will it be? Baked clams, polenta marinara, linguine aglio e olio, or steak pizzaioli? Or maybe a really delicious pepper-and-egg sandwich or baccala

Sicilian-style on Fridays (but call ahead to check on the baccala, because it seems to come and go). Whenever I see giambotta on a menu, the words that jump into my mind are “rustic Italian.” Giambotta means “big mixture” or “big mess.” This melange of Italian sausage (and this deftly seasoned sausage was some of the best around) along with chunks of chicken and pork, peppers, onions, mushrooms, all dampened with a light tomato sauce, is as rustic as it gets. This “big mess” of delicious enjoyment will get to you the next day and the next day as you remember how really delicious it was. And I could say the same thing about the eggplant Parmigiana at Cuzzin's. The slabs of eggplant were lightly breaded (too many places put so much breading on the eggplant that you could use it to side your house) and layered with mozzarella and provolone (the provolone added a sharpness that brought the tomato sauce into its own). As big as a brick and with a side of penne pasta, this eggplant parm was a bargain at just \$12.95. The pep-

per and egg sandwich (you can also get a potato and egg) at Cuzzin's doesn't quite stack up to the goodness of those served at Buona, for example, but I did like that the eggs were moist and fluffy, and the peppers, of which there were plenty, had been cooked to point of being soft and silky, which is one of the important parts of a true Chicago pepper and egg sandwich. Cuzzin's features neckbones on Wednesdays and Saturdays (and get ready to rumble with dem bones, because they are messy as hell but, oh, so good) and tripe the Italian way (with red gravy) on Thursdays and Fridays. You may not have room for dessert, but just in case, you can choose from tiramisu, cannoli and spumoni. Have the cannoli, because the pastry shell was crisp and the ricotta filling was creamy and rich. My alternate choice would be the well-made ricotta cheesecake.

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**THANK YOU, PAT BRUNO!**