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Schoharie Valley Farms Carrot Barn is treat for all the senses

By **Caroline Lee** November 11, 2013

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SCHOHARIE - Hurricanes Irene and Lee may have devastated the Schoharie Valley in 2011, but they were no match for the people here, or the soil. The farms repair and prosper, and the people rebuild and renew.

When I mentioned The Carrot Barn as a possible review I got an enthusiastic response. Go and support the business, I was told. See how much progress has been made since the floods. Now I can add to that. The Schoharie Valley is a beautiful place to visit, and the Carrot Barn at Schoharie Valley

Farms is a treasure.

My phone is full of photos of my trip to the picturesque Carrot Barn. Beyond the seasonal display of mums and vibrant, cool-weather pansies near the greenhouse are vast verdant fields, and farther on, red and gold hills with a dramatic gray escarpment.

The barn sells plants, produce, gifts, and locally procured dairy and beef. There's a small cafe with counter service, and food to eat in or take out.

Visual treat

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When you step from the porch into the barn lined with pale knotty pine paneling, it's hard to decide where to look first. Of course there are apples -- bins and bins of every kind and color imaginable -- also autumn vegetables such as squash and turnips, broccoli, eggplant and kale.

We marveled at the brilliant purple cauliflower and cone-shaped green cabbages. Then there are the jams and jellies, maple syrup, honey, baked goods, chocolates, soap, candles and clever wreaths made of Indian corn. The cafe is in the back on the right.

There's a menu posted near the cafe; alongside is a chalkboard with the day's specials. The fare is light, mostly sandwiches, salads and homemade soup. The cold cuts are Boar's Head, the breads are homemade. Put in your order at the small deli counter. Your name will be called when it's ready.

When I placed my order, I added two Boylan sodas from the nearby cooler (\$1.75 each) and a few bakery items to the tab. If you're just there for baked goods, go straight to the register at the bakery counter. There's a glass display case featuring attractive cupcakes, handsome layer cakes, cookies, and pastries. And of course, cider doughnuts.

We were eying some picture-perfect frozen rib-eye steaks when I heard my name called. Virginia carried our tray to one of about a half-dozen wooden tables. We set aside the white waxed bakery bags and dug in.

Healthful choices

The menu is on the healthful side: no fried food, and a good selection of salads. You won't get chips, but you can add sliced apples or cucumber slices and grape tomatoes for a dollar. Sandwiches are priced between five and six dollars. Virginia got a half sandwich and soup, (\$6.95) and I had a small salad and soup (\$6.95).

I enjoyed the creamy chicken and rice soup, which stayed hot until my salad was finished. I liked the small serving of the Carrot Barn Classic salad with its sprinkling of sunflower seeds and tasty croutons.

All the requisite salad vegetables were represented: green leaf lettuce, peeled cucumber, thinly sliced red onion, carrot shavings and grape tomatoes. The house dressing, honey balsamic, came in a small cup on the side. All of the vegetables were perfectly fresh.

Restaurants seem to love green leaf lettuce, and it's perfectly fine stuff. It makes a salad look "fluffy," one chef told me. The only problem is that if you slice the head whole, you've got the lettuce version of spaghetti.

This, you may conclude by the effort given here, is my one restaurant pet peeve. I found a plastic knife near the bakery counter and made short work of the spaghetti.

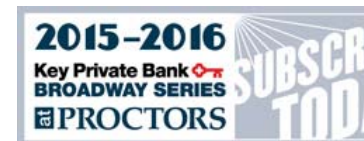
The chicken and rice soup was more thickened than creamy, but delicious. Small pieces of carrot and celery and chopped parsley livened up the appearance of the soup, which by definition is going to be pale. My spoon unearthed an abundance of bite-sized pieces of white meat chicken and just enough rice. Very nice homemade soup.

Virginia approved of her minestrone. "There's red beans, squash, carrot, tomato, and ditalini," she said, naming the stubby tubes of the traditional pasta. "Just like I make it." Needless to say, it was just how she likes it.



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The turkey pesto sandwich was outstanding. The red ripe tomato slices, provolone cheese, and roasted red pepper were each good on their own, but the pesto aioli made the sandwich. "It really went so well with everything," Virginia explained. The sandwich would be delicious even without the turkey, she noted. Another plus: It's served on soft homemade multigrain bread.

Raisin reminder

Virginia bit into the carrot cupcake (\$2.50) only to be reminded that carrot cake usually contains raisins, about the only thing she won't eat. She probably forgot because she was charmed by the small piped carrot atop the cream cheese frosting.

Luckily, most of the raisins were on the bottom and easily avoided. Otherwise, it was delicious. "The cake is moist and the frosting is sweet," she declared, adding, "And creamy, too." Good cupcake.

I purchased half a dozen cider cake doughnuts for husband Eric. I caught a glimpse of freshly cooked doughnuts, seven big trays of them, on a bakery rack just outside the kitchen door. They perfume the barn, and in addition to the soft, tasteful music and stunning array of the local bounty, make a visit there a pleasure for many of the senses.

The tab for lunch, with two sodas and tax, came to \$21.50.

Puzzle bag

When you go, be sure to purchase a Schoharie Valley puzzle bag for \$5. The donation goes directly to an agency coordinating rebuilding and recovery efforts in the valley.

The point is to collect all the pieces, with one of each kind available at shops and businesses throughout the community, to complete a photo of an aerial view of the area. Collecting all 30 pieces will take you through about the most beautiful scenery anywhere, and supporting the local businesses will make you feel good.

Memo: The Carrot Barn at Schoharie Valley Farms

WHERE: 5606 State Route 30, Schoharie. 295-7139, www.schoharievalleyfarms.com

WHEN: 10:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. daily March through Dec. 24. 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturdays during January and February

HOW MUCH: \$21.50, with two sodas and tax.

MORE INFO: Children's menu. Credit cards: MasterCard, Visa, American Express, Discover. Plenty of parking

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