

# Comfort food on a movie set

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With so much development taking over the metropolitan area, it's hard these days to find any building or street with any history. But if you head through the old town of Laurel, you'll find storefronts and businesses that look pretty much as if time has passed them by.

Take Oliver's Saloon, for example.

Although it is probably classified as a sports bar, you won't find much here that's new and glitzy, except, of course, for the various television sets and the chance to play keno via a monitor up front.

Instead, Oliver's looks like it could serve as a stage set for a 1940s movie, with its wooden floors, small tables with oilcloth tablecloths, and cozy bar area with tall stools.

Yet, management has updated the menu to include some 1990s popular items, such as the nachos ("everything you can think of," says the menu), the stuffed potato skins, and the now ubiquitous Buffalo wings that almost every pub-type eatery serves to patrons. You'll even find that standard favorite, the grilled chicken Caesar salad, that has nearly the same widespread fame as do the nachos and the wings.

So time has not really bypassed Oliver's; it's just left a few footprints here and there.

Despite such updated dishes as those mentioned, you can still sink your teeth into an order of steamed little neck clams or steamed mussels or the restaurant's famous steamed shrimp, cooked with beer and onions and served with onions, cocktail sauce and drawn butter.

You can also find the club sandwich, with a few modern variations on the classic theme. Oliver's offers the Canton Club (roast beef and turkey), the Gold Coast Club (chicken salad); Anchorage Club (tuna salad and cheddar), and the Little Italy Club (Italian meats, provolone

cheese, and a special sauce). I chose the Little Italy Club for a recent lunch.

Although the menu tells you that you will find something more between the slices than the usual bacon, cheese, chicken and ham, it's still surprising to find some rather flavorful sliced Italian sandwich meats, along with the cheese, bacon, mayo, lettuce and tomatoes. This is a good sandwich, but had I ordered a side of their special fries (with gravy, with cheddar, or with Old Bay Seasoning and apple cider vinegar) the sandwich would have been magnificent.

On a return visit, I might order their Kitchen Sink burger, with cheddar, relish, bacon, mushrooms, peppers, grilled onions, lettuce, tomatoes and mayo; this would be heaven on earth. Or The Best Reuben would be the next choice, or possibly their crab cake platter with fries and cole slaw. This includes only one crab cake, according to the menu, but it is loaded with lump crabmeat.

You'll find daily specials on the blackboard, and if you come for dinner, you'll get to sample from among their limited entree selections such dishes as broiled scallops, garlic shrimp, steak and prawns, a strip steak and seafood Alfredo.

Desserts are limited to a carrot cake, a chocolate cake, and sometimes several selections of cheesecakes, the waitress said. But none of those seemed particularly appealing the lunchtime I stopped by. Perhaps it was just that the club sandwich had been enough; in fact, I took home the final quarter for another day, another meal.

But since this is about finding a nostalgia place with roots in the past, perhaps on a next visit an old-fashioned meal of onion soup, fries and a basic hamburger would be the best choice.

That sounds like comfort food at its best.