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Living

Munch goes to MixStirs Cafe

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Munch loves cocktails. Munch is one of those people who can always justify a little nip, so imagine Munch's excitement when MixStirs Cafe opened in Market Square.

"Hoorah," thought Munch. "Such a conveniently located drinking establishment so close to the office."

Imagine Munch's horror when the door of MixStirs opened up to a line at the counter and a menu on the wall that listed wraps, paninis and protein drinks. Munch closed the door, walked over to the ale house and resolved to come back another day with expectations in check.

And so, Munch did. With Christmas quickly approaching, Munch and Outdoorsy Friend of Munch (OFOM) needed to get out of the office and pick up a little something to eat and a couple of little somethings as gifts. In other words, we wanted food quickly that wasn't fast food. MixStirs was the order of the day.

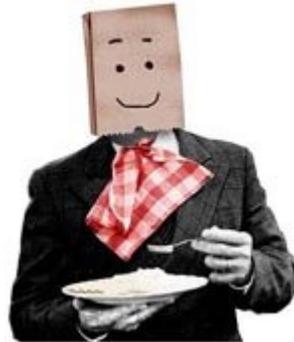
For Munch the place could barely be more convenient. It's the perfect spot to meet friends who work on Liberty Avenue (in the buildings, not along the sidewalk) and friends who work at Highmark and PPG.

The concept for MixStirs -- Munch just found on the Web that there are other locations in Boston and New Jersey -- seems to make sense for 10 of the 13 locations for the restaurant: they are located in health clubs. MixStirs has two locations in Pittsburgh -- in Market Square and on Grant Street.

Now, I don't know if the owners ever looked at the usual folks who hang in Market Square -- they are either screaming about religion or need to sleep one off. And the lawyers on Grant Street are known for spending more time inside saloons than gyms, but oddly, the place not only works, on many days, there is a long line for the food.

Munch clearly has no head for what the market will bear.

MixStirs' menu is way up on the wall above the heads of the people who are standing in line. The placement makes it either uncomfortable to read or a good place to pretend you are



MixStirs, 431 Market St., Downtown; 412-288-8999

doing a yoga move; you make the call.

OFOM -- who is also often up for a drink -- thought the chocolate covered strawberry protein stir (\$4.85 for a 16-ounce cup) sounded good. Munch wondered how one would know whether the strawberries had been covered in chocolate once the thing was tossed in the blender. Munch took a sip (after assurances of no known flu exposure) and it was tasty and smooth. For a sandwich, OFOM ordered the roast beef panini (\$6.25), which he reported was not made with the usual lousy deli meat, but a better grade.

Munch, decided to go for something close to healthy, the black bean, cheese and rice wrap (\$5.95), which has cheddar and mozzarella cheeses, tomato, salsa and onions. When the choice of what type of tortilla came up -- flour, spinach, whole wheat or lo carb -- Munch chose the least-healthy option. The sandwich was not rave-worthy. Munch did not run into the square shouting for all to hear that they should stand in line, but it was fine.

For a stir (Munch's eyes roll at that), Munch ordered a vitamin stir, the ragin' raspberries (\$4.29), which was advertised to give an energy boost. It was good, but that energy boost was lost after a short round of shopping (nothing compared to the hordes on Black Friday) and a walk back to the office where Munch wanted nothing more than a nap.

MixStirs is the type of place Munch should have gone the first week of next year during the two or three days that the New Year's resolutions are in place after the hangover is gone.

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