

## Homestyle food, friendly service offered at Culver's

BY J.J. HARDER

It's time for restaurant fusion: Take one part McDonald's and mix it with one part small-town corner café. Then add in one part Dairy Queen and mix in a little Milwaukee flavor (Not beer!).

If it sounds like an odd combination, I'd have to agree. But at 15th and Old Cheney, Culver's is this weird synthesis in a real-life restaurant. And it's pulling off the mixture remarkably well.

Culver's is definitely a chain, but it's not like a McDonald's or a Burger King. Similar to Runza, Culver's is a regional chain that tries to sell food using the hometown-grandma, apple pie-remember times when things were better shtick.

The place is a cookie cutter of a restaurant, but Culver's seems to mask the vinyl booths and sanitized white walls with a bit of genuine compassion. Old diner lights above the table, slow-moving ceiling fans and carpet warm the place up. You're supposed to feel like a number at Mickey D's and, although orders have numbers at Culver's, the friendly people and their deliberate pace shows actual caring.

The chain started more than 15 years ago in Sauk City, Wisconsin. Culver's is kind of like a Village Inn without the breakfast. It serves standard American sandwiches such as grilled ham and cheese, Philly cheese steak, roast beef and chicken breast. It also has dinners and baskets of fried chicken and Norwegian Cod (must be a Wisconsin thing).

But like its logo reads, Culver's specialties are frozen custard and butterburgers. These aren't the homestyle dishes we're used to in Nebraska, but every undergraduate in Madison, Wis., can tell you the glories of frozen custard. It's simply ice cream made with some egg yolk, but after one try, you'll realize ice cream is incredibly inferior.

Culver's offers chocolate and vanilla custard everyday plus a rotation of specials, such as Chocolate Covered Strawberry and Hershey Almond Kiss.

As for the butterburgers, no, you're not going to get a big patty of margarine on your burger. The bun of the burger is slightly buttered and toasted. You barely taste it, but it's one of those quirks that gives a place a quaint reputation. The downside of the burgers is that the patties are extremely thin - the tomatoes may be thicker. Order a double to be filled up.

The fries are also a disappointment - Runza's simply take the Culver's version behind the woodshed.

The single best thing about Culver's, however, is the fact that they have cheese curds. This is another one of those northerner things you can't find around here. Café Carrera in Eagle is the closest place I have found.

A cheese curd is basically a ball of cheese coated in a batter and then fried. The Culver's rendition isn't a masterpiece, but it's better than trying to make mozzarella sticks do. For the best ever, try Minnesota Picnic in the Twin Cities.

Culver's is Wisconsin's attempt at Runza, and if the two were matched, I'd take Runza most every time, except for dessert where Culver's is king. Try a custard sundae and see what I mean.

But the food is a bit pricier at Culver's, and it is definitely not fast. In fact, people pay in the drive-thru and then pull forward - someone actually has to bring it out to them. But at least that's a reminder that the food isn't cooked until after we order - which is hard to serve up in minutes and seconds.

I recommend the Bacon ButterBurger Deluxe, cheese curds and a turtle sundae. Let the custard get the best of you, and make it a favorite with your friends. But keep it real with Nebraska's own, Runza, or we may be eating Norwegian Cod at Husker games.

RESTAURANT REVIEW

### Culver's

Type: Home-style fast food

Where: 1500 Old Cheney Rd.

Entree: \$4-9

★★★ of 4 stars

# An Electronic Christmas

Stories by Melanie Mensch

## Digital technology gifts tops among college-aged buyers

Sure, kids can pine for scooters and video games weeks before the Christmas kickoff, but what does the kid at heart, the 20-something and older adult want this year?

Local retail managers predicted what gifts will be hot, and it looks like basically any technological gifts will be welcome underneath the Christmas tree this year.

"Anything digital is hot this year," said Jeff Martz, a manager at Circuit City in the Gateway Mall, 61st and O streets.

Digital technology has raised the standards in electronics, including marvel gadgetry such as DVD players, CDs, digital cameras and video games, leaving VCRs and older models of TVs on the shelves.

"This morning we had eight PlayStation IIs, and they were gone in 15 minutes," he said. "Folks can't special order them, so it's a first-come, first-serve basis."

Paul DeVore, floor manager at Target, 333 N. 48th St., said any new technological merchandise, such as palm pilots and laptop computers, were wish-list favorites.

Electronic gifts, costing into the hundreds, aren't all fun and games, so if the number of people on your gift list outnumber the dollars in your wallet, stores still offer a range of affordable gift ideas.

Jim Bolin, a department manager at the Gateway JC Penney's, said Christmas novelties such as fiber-optic lighted trees have been popular buys.

Also, winter wear such as fleece and sweaters kept consumers warm this year.

Barnes & Noble General Manager Bob Condello said the store at 51st and O streets provides a last-minute stop for inexpensive gifts such as books, coffee and novelties.

"We think 'Are we going to have enough of this?'" he said. "So we stock up, and you think we would have enough, but we really do run out of stuff."

Condello said hot books this season include Joel Sartore's "Nebraska: Under a Big Red Sky," "The Beatles Anthology" and the entire Harry Potter children's book series.

"Our business tends to bloom late in the season because we have the lower dollar stuff after people are done buying all the expensive things," he said.

Paperbacks sell better as they generally cost less than the hardcover version, Condello said, and the store sells pounds and pounds of its brand of coffee and tea, especially during the colder months.

However, if any of these ideas fail to inspire a shopping trip, many stores sell gift certificates, relieving any anxiety over getting the perfect gift.

"It doesn't package as nice as a boom box," Martz said, "but at least they get what they want."

## Shoppers look to buying gifts using simple points and clicks

Oh, the weather outside is frightful, and online shopping is quite delightful this season for those who want to stay out of the cold.

Web sites for popular retail stores offer holiday hunters a different avenue for purchasing gifts for loved ones.

Shoppers can visit their favorite stores without fighting traffic and waiting in line at local malls like Gateway Mall, 61st and O streets, and SouthPointe Pavilions, 27th and Pine Lake Road.

Store Web sites, such as Gap.com, BestBuy.com and BarnesandNoble.com to name a few, let curious customers peruse merchandise, select items and purchase gifts, all with a just few clicks of a mouse.

Jim Bolin, department manager at Gateway's JC Penney, said online services offered the same advantages as catalogue shopping.

"You can avoid the hustle and bustle and shop at home," he said. "If something you purchased isn't what you expected, you can return it just as a catalogue service."

Web sites not only offer a sneak peak at what's in stores but serve as a keen source of merchandise information.

Jeff Martz, a manager at Circuit City near Gateway, said more customers tend to use the store's Web site for information before actually buying

"You can avoid the hustle and bustle and shop at home."

Jim Bolin

JC Penney department manager

an item in person. "People could buy a book or go to the store to learn about an item," he said, "but they just research it at home, reserve it and have it delivered. Or they find out about it online first. Some customers want to physically see it versus just seeing a picture."

Paul DeVore, floor manager at Target, 333 N. 48th St., said despite the benefits of online shopping, store Web sites won't replace the reality of retail stores anytime soon.

"If we sell out of a particular item in the store, people can buy it online," he said, "but a lot of people aren't used to buying online."

But some store managers said the online sites help boost sales in stores by offering customers a chance to browse without the holiday rush.

Bob Condello, general manager at Barnes & Noble, 51st and O streets, said the option of online shopping was the "greatest thing for the store."

"It's not competition at all," he said. "I mean, our store has an ambiance that a Web site can't beat. Our book buyers don't work that way. The stores are where the people are, and we put it in your hand right here."



Shawn Ballarin/DN

# Miniature furniture offers a window into the past

BY SARAH SUMNER

Humans have an obsession for miniature objects.

Be it for prehistoric religious reasons, representations of possessions for lack of cameras in medieval times or for "knick-knack" pleasure, people are fascinated with tiny things.

"But why do people like little things for non-religious or practical reasons? I don't know, but humans just do," said Renee Laegreid, curator of the Kruger Collection.

Whatever the reason, the place to find miniatures is at the "Curator's Choice: Selections from the Kruger Collection," which starts its exhibition today at the Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery and will be displayed until Jan. 21.

Eloise Kruger, who gave the collection to the College of Architecture and Interior Design Program in 1996, has collected

miniature furniture since the late 1930s.

The collection consists of more than 20,000 miniature furniture replicas. Though the pieces are mostly from America, she has collected miniatures from all over the world. She would, on occasion, have certain pieces made for her by specific artists.

"Eloise Kruger had a particular interest in American furniture styles, so that although there are many examples of neoclassical and Victorian pieces, they represent American interpretations of these styles," Laegreid said.

The architectural time period of the Kruger Collection spans from the medieval era through the 1970s and strings together the changes and evolution of furniture design.

The displays are in chronological order, and each have a theme and explanation as to how that theme influenced the style of that time.

Displaying the collection is to "explore more fully visual and material culture and art's role in that," said Daniel Siedell, Sheldon curator.

This collection illustrates the changes of people's ideas, architecture and lifestyles from time period to time period, Siedell said.

The tiny art figures are 1/12 their actual size and are amazingly accurate to the details of life-size furniture. They include features of

articles such as a violin in its black leather case that has a green inlay, a bow, tuning tools at the head of the violin and small gold clasps on the case.

A reproduction of a classical Greek statue exhibits facial features and distinct curves of the body and clothing.

"German Folk Bedroom" displays painted vases, tiny blankets and articles bundled into bedroom shelves.

Along with the miniature-furniture displays, there is another exhibition derived from the Kruger Collection titled "Entryways, Portals, and Transitions" that will be displayed at the Kruger Gallery in Architecture Hall through March 21.

On Dec. 6, from 12:15 until 1 p.m., Renee Laegreid will give a talk on the "Curator's Choice" at the Sheldon.

Because the collection is exhibited at the Sheldon, Kruger is no longer afraid her collection will be divided or stored; also, the pieces can be shared with the public.

"I hope they like looking at the pieces," Laegreid said. "I think they do, judging by the amount of nose prints on the display window glass."



Classical Greek statue

GALLERY PREVIEW

### Curator's Choice: Selections from the Kruger Collection

Where: Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery, 12th & R

When: Nov. 21-Jan. 21

Cost: Free