

Vegans of Seitan in Linden is the place to go for meatless fare

Philly cheese steaks, mac 'n cheese burgers, and Italian hot dogs are some of the menu selections at the Vegans of Seitan (pronounced SAY-tan) restaurant in Linden that mimic meats without sacrificing taste.

Owner River Brooks and her sister, Rochelle, spend about four hours preparing the seitan mixture before opening their doors to customers at 1 p.m. This plant-based meat substitute is a wheat-gluten mass of protein that, when seasoned and cooked, imitates favorites like fried chicken and pepper steak. Specials are added often, and holidays are vegan barbecue time here with rib tibs a popular request.

It took River two years to master the vegan recipes. Only eight items appeared on the menu during the business' start-up while sharing after-hours space with a Rahway restaurant. She even initially volunteered there for four months to learn about restaurant operations and how to work the grill. Rochelle assisted in the prep on weekends before partnering full-time in the business following a layoff as a corporate chef. When the pandemic hit and the restaurant closed, the two had to explore other options.

A bistro agreeably provided shared space but they quickly outgrew it given their budding following. So, the two sisters drove around town for several weeks searching for vacan-



The 'Buffalo Cauliflower Tings' are battered and deep fried then drizzled with a house made Buffalo sauce.

cies before finding a spot in Linden. Rent-free for three months, restaurant renovations were undertaken by the duo without contractors. River laughs at how she and her sister are now quite adept on operating cutting saws and hanging wallpaper.

"We did it with our own money and ambition, our own creativity and made it our place," she said proudly about the makeover. Besides the décor, the background music here is a compilation of old school R&B tunes, disco and soft rock.

"People love, love, love the music," she said. "They always tell me that my playlist is sensational."

With 13,000 followers on Instagram, the business regularly posts photos of Asian, American, and Soul food menu options as well as Mexican fare, such as Cheesy Veggie Quesadillas and Empanadas.

Tasty desserts are Rochelle's area of specialty with offerings including Red Velvet Vegan Cake and Sweet Potato Tart.

"You'll love the food," River said. "If people could just come in and see that there is another alternative to eating besides putting animals on a plate, they will learn that the food is better."

With both take-out and indoor dining offered, the restaurant serves all meals in take-out containers to save time but also to provide convenience to diners bringing food home.

A self-taught cook, River first became interested in meatless fare after watching a documentary about six years ago on how meat is processed. Eliminating fish and chicken from her diet were the last two vestiges of animal products included in her meals before she abstained completely and followed the veganism philosophy. Being vegan is more than just having a salad; it's a healthier way of eating, she explained.

"You owe it to yourself to at least try the food and then make an educated decision on what is better for you," she said. "Give yourself 30 days to take in the vegan lifestyle to see what it does for you, not only physically, but mentally."



The seitan mixture used at Vegans of Seitan can imitate fried chicken, pepper steak and more.



The 'Jersey Girl Philly Cheese Steak Sandwich' is Vegans of Seitan's No. 1 seller.



'Mocktails' is a play on the Caribbean favorite, oxtails.

For Thanksgiving, call ahead. Vegan turkey and ham, mac and cheese, lasagna, stuffing, cranberry sauce, cornbread, and greens — all made from scratch — will be available the day before the holiday.

Located at 243 West Saint Georges Ave., in Linden, the restaurant is open Wednesday through Saturday from 1 to 8 p.m., and offers free Wi-Fi.

For more information, visit www.vegansofseitan.com or call 908-290-3614.

— Debra Stevko Miller