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Thursday, Jan. 08, 2009

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Friendly Cortez Cafe a great place for breakfast

By JANA MORREALE - jmorreale@bradenton.com

Cortez Cafe is one of those great little restaurants that's always packed with regulars because the service is good and the food is better. The restaurant is located in a strip plaza in the Village of Cortez. And if you like breakfast, this is the place for you.

On a recent trip to the cafe, four of us were greeted at the door by the owner, Sam, and he found us a table quickly even though the place was busy. There are two small rooms with booths and tables, and local artwork of fish and other wildlife adorns the walls.

The breakfast menu is large and includes the usual suspects, and a "specials board" lists that day's best. Eggs Benedict, plate-sized pancakes and four-egg omelets are the big stars.



Photos by GRANT JEFFERIES/gjefferies@bradenton.com A Greek omelette with spinach, tomato and feta cheese, served with hash brown potatoes, and at right a waffle with strawberries, served with whip cream and pecans, at the Cortez Cafe.

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A friendly waitress arrived with coffee, which was hot and flavorful. One of my dining companions was very hungry and ordered a cheese omelet which comes with your choice of potatoes or grits and toast for \$6.50. He chose the hash browns and added a side of corn beef hash (\$3.50). I ordered the Greek omelet with home fries (\$6.95).

Our other two guests decided to split a vegetable omelet (\$6.75) with bacon on the side (\$2.50). They had no problem splitting the dish, which they do at some restaurants, and since the omelets are huge it was more than enough for two to share.

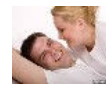
Cortez Cafe is one of those places where everyone knows everyone else; it's been open for 50 years. Friendly greetings and table visiting are a common site. It's a restaurant that has a great friendly atmosphere and that is a great way to start the day.

Our breakfast arrived after a short wait. I tasted my companion's cheese omelet and it was full of melted gooey American cheese and the hash browns were crisp but not greasy. I hate hash browns that aren't cooked all the way through.

My omelet was stuffed full of spinach, tomato and feta cheese, flavor oozing with each bite. I love the combination of warm tomatoes and spinach and the bite of the feta brings it all together perfectly. And, it's heart-healthy. My home fries were perfectly seasoned, cooked with a bit of caramelized onion.

The vegetable omelet turned out to be my favorite, brimming with fresh sauteed red bell pepper, onion, tomatoes, mushrooms — all topped with cheese. The flavors of the combined vegetables made this a winner. The bacon was perfectly prepared, crisp but not overcooked.

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On other visits to the restaurant, I've had the pancakes, which fill an entire large plate. Light and fluffy, one is enough to fill you up. One large pancake is \$2.50 and flavors include blueberry, banana nut, pecan or chocolate chip. My mom prefers the silver dollar pancakes (10 for \$3.25) which are still light and fluffy, but a much smaller version.

I've also had the restaurant's homemade sausage gravy and biscuits (\$4.45), which are some of the best in town. Big, fresh biscuits topped with a creamy white gravy with crumbled sausage. It was just the right consistency, not glue like some I've had.

Lunch items at the cafe include Manhattan sandwiches — turkey or roast beef served on bread with real mashed potatoes and gravy (\$6.50). The popular fish hoagie (\$7.50) can be ordered blackened, fried or grilled. Hamburgers are 8 ounces and range from \$5.50 for a hamburger to \$6.50 for the Cortez Burger with grilled onions and Swiss cheese on Texas Toast. Add french fries for \$1 or onion rings, sweet potato fries and spicy fries for \$1.50.

On the lighter side, there are also many Greek specialties on the menu, including several pita wraps with marinated grilled chicken and their famous Greek salad with homemade dressing (\$5.50 for a large). You can also add grilled, marinated chicken or grill or blackened fish to the salad for an extra charge.

If you visit Cortez Cafe, I'm sure you'll become a regular too.

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**ibdebi wrote on 01/08/2009 10:18:33 AM:**

Hi Jana, Thank you so much for the wonderful review you gave Cortez Caf! Sam and I have owned it since 2002, we have poured our hearts and souls into it, its so great to be recognized by our hometown. In these terrible economic times that have hit all restaurants, we feel blessed to have our regulars that support us and now the Bradenton Herald. We do have a web site if you want to check it out, it has our complete menu on it. [www.cortezcafe.com](http://www.cortezcafe.com) Again, Our Thanks and Blessings! Kindest Regards, Debi & Sam Varelis

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