

# Bar food redefined



The 6-ounce beef filet comes with roasted peppers and lump crab.

## Uptown Grille

3100 E. West Maple Road, Commerce Township

Call: (248) 960-3344

On the Web: [www.uptowngrille.com](http://www.uptowngrille.com)

Rating: ★★★

Hours: 11 a.m.-10 p.m. Mon.-Thurs. and Sun., 11 a.m.-11 p.m. Fri.-Sat. Bar stays open later

Prices: Appetizers, soups and salads, \$3.49-\$9.99; sandwiches and burgers, \$6.99-\$11.99; entrees, \$8.99-\$26.95

Credit cards: All major

Liquor: Full bar, a large selection of Michigan and other craft beers, and a small but well-chosen wine list

Smoking: In the bar only

Parking: Attached lot

Wheelchair access: No barriers

Uptown's offerings are smart, fresh and local

At first, Uptown Grille may appear to be just another sports bar. There are the requisite high-definition plasma TVs forming a wall of sound and color over the bar staffed by friendly servers in black T-shirts.

It's comfortably casual, with high, bare-top tables under a high ceiling. Uncovered windows offer a glimpse of the big patio on the side of the building that in summertime is very much a part of the scene. There's a dance floor and a good sound system.

It takes a while for the difference to register, and it comes in exactly the right place — on the plates. This is a sports/entertainment complex with high standards of food quality.

While the menu certainly offers bar food essentials such as hot wings, pizza, chips and salsa, and burgers, these dishes, like more elaborate entrees, are carefully prepared with quality ingredients. Beef for the burgers, as well as the steaks, for example, comes from Oregon's Painted



MOLLY ABRAHAM



Photos by John M. Galloway / Special to The Detroit News

Uptown Grille in Commerce Township offers 30 craft beers, more than half of which are made in Michigan.



Melissa Holton serves beverages to Steve Katz, left, of Farmington Hills, Dave Boulter of Livonia and Joe McPhail of Fenton.

Hills, a bastion of natural beef.

Don't let the wall of TVs and the casual atmosphere fool you; this is a place that offers what I call "real" food — whether it's snacks to accompany one of the 30 craft beers — more than half made in Michigan — or full-course dinners that include lasagna, rib-eye steak and Parmesan-dusted whitefish.

The menu is extensive — some would say probably too much so, and I agree that it lacks focus. But

proprietors Joe Hibbert and Ryan Adams, who met when both worked for a national chain restaurant and shared a dream of opening their own place, take the view that if even a few diners order a particular dish, it stays.

The list of side dishes shows the attention to detail. Sides include not just onion rings and fries, but nice little departures such as sweet potatoes, either mashed or fried, an excellent coleslaw spiced with wasabi,

scalloped potatoes, asparagus spears and seasonal vegetables.

During the summer, the proprietors say they are committed to buying vegetables and produce from local farmers, just as they support the Michigan breweries and wine producers.

Wine, by the way, is very reasonably priced, with most glasses in the \$5-\$7 range, something that is becoming harder and harder to find.

Uptown Grille opened in July 2008, after Hibbert and Adams had searched for a suitable location for many months. They found it in the former Elephant Bar, renovating the premises from top to bottom.

The building is huge — 14,000 square feet that includes three different elements. There's a retail shop/casual café that sells beer, wine and fair-trade coffee and serves breakfast starting at 6 a.m.; a spacious dining room and banquet rooms sequestered toward the back of the building; and the big central bar, where there is live music most evenings. All told, it seats about 400.

Certainly, 2008 was not the most propitious time to take on a huge project. But Uptown struck a chord with the Commerce Township, Novi, Farmington Hills and West Bloomfield Township neighborhoods, and it has been a hit from the start, even though its address is a bit of a puzzle.

East West Maple Road? Yes, by some quirk of geography, that's correct, and it's worth seeking out for good food, knowledgeable service and a lively, unpretentious atmosphere.

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