

# Dining on the cheap

With America's economic situation affecting everybody's budget, but not their taste buds, we find three of Iowa City's best meals for under \$10.

By **ANNA WICKES**

anna-wickes@uiowa.edu

The University of Iowa Office of Student Financial Aid provides estimated costs for all undergraduate students for the 2010-11 academic year, allocating of \$3,633.00 for "personal expenses."

This number will likely include going out to eat, and in this "era of economic contraction," most students will be on a budget.

The good news is that with local ingredients and these budgets in mind, Iowa City has become a mini Mecca of local restaurants offering a host of culinary options at almost any price.

Here are just a few of the best local meals under \$10.

## **Mesa Pizza, 114 E. Washington St.**

Total: \$6.50 plus tax

Mesa Pizza Iowa City, the second location for the Minneapolis-based East Coast-style pizza place, is reminiscent of the slice joints that pepper New York City streets and beach towns.

One fantastic thing about Mesa Pizza: the 50 varieties of pizza available, include such standouts as chicken cordon blue, bacon cheeseburger, and spicy chicken burrito, as well as vegan and vegetarian options.

Alex Stamford, a Mesa

employee, said the most popular is macaroni and cheese and the second is Buffalo chicken.

I decided to get second fantastic thing, the \$6.50 lunch special, which includes two slices and a drink and picked the two favorites.

The macaroni and cheese was the better of the two, an ideal blend of these two tasty foods.

The blue cheese on the Buffalo chicken slice was a bit plasticky tasting for my liking, and I would not order it kind again.

But with 48 additional kinds, this is more a relief than inconvenience.

## **Z'Mariks, 19 S. Dubuque St.**

Total: \$5.89 plus tax

Located in downtown Iowa City for more than seven years now, this restaurant was created with a low prices and high quality in mind.

I ordered a large Mostaccioli for 5.89 plus tax. While hot and fast, the flavor of the dish left a little bit to be desired.

Promising me a sauce described as a "savory blend of garlic, cream, and white wine," it lacked punch, with the exception of the occasional garlicky and delicious bite of spinach. The Romano cheese also bound all the other ingredients together

into a ball at the bottom of the bowl, leaving me with mouthfuls of penne.

The portion was generous, and I left with both a to-go box with dinner and a satiated appetite.

Next time, I am going with the Spicy Peanut or the locally famous Mac and Cheese.

## **Her Soup Kitchen, 625 S. Dubuque St.**

Total: \$9 plus tax

Her Soup Kitchen is a light and airy place in which the tables and chairs are charmingly mismatched and the food is delightful.

This locally owned spot prides itself on using local/regional, sustainable, and organic products when possible, and this was reflected in my delicious turkey, artichoke, and spinach sandwich and corn salsa tortilla soup, one of the vegan options.

The real standouts were the freshly carved turkey and ripe heirloom tomatoes stacked on the sandwich, undoubtedly fresh from somebody's garden.

The soup was tasty and subtle, an unexpectedly refreshing choice for August.

Next time you are looking for a bite to eat without breaking the bank, check out one of these options and get some good flavor for just a few bucks.