

FARE COMMENT

Plain Prices, Exotic Dishes At Munjed's

**Munjed's Mideastern Cafe,
536 Westcott St., Syracuse
425-0308. No credit cards. No
non-smoking section. Dining
room accessible to wheel-
chairs.**

By DENNIS HARROD

AS EATING OUT con-
tinues to grow more
ubiquitously expensive,
it's a matter of survival to be
familiar with places where
you can still get a good meal
at a decent price. The best of
these places give you some-
thing extra, either in the way
of attitude or in the quality of
the food.

Munjed's succeeds on both
counts, with an attitude of
frank friendliness and food
that is consistently excellent.

One reason the food is inex-
pensive is that you're not pay-
ing for atmosphere. Not that
it's lacking in ambience — it's
just not the kind you have to
pay extra for.

Munjed's is in a storefront,
with seven tables scattered in
a small room, and the kitchen
open behind a counter.

Patrons help themselves to
drinks from a cooler in the
dining room after placing
their order at the counter.
Drinks include bottles of juice
(65 cents) or various cans of
Goya fruit nectars (93 cents).

The decorations are typical
Syracuse eclectic, with a
large photo of the Carrier
Dome placed next to a picture
of Mecca.

The menu is divided
between dinners and sand-
wiches, the latter not to be
taken too literally, as orders
of hummus and tabouli and
grape leaves fall into this
category. Sandwich prices run
from \$2.50 for the falafel up
to \$3.50 for chawirma or
shishkabob.

Dinners range from \$4.20
for falafel to \$6 for Munjed's
platter, which includes a sam-
ple of everything. Since we
felt indecisive on a recent Fri-
day afternoon, the platter
offered an easy choice.

The best thing about the
platter was that everything
was equally good and equally
interesting. A bite of stuffed
grape leaves, with rice and a
touch of mint, seemed unbeat-
able, but so did the falafel, the
shishkabob, the chawirma and
hummus. The tabouli was a
bit heavy on the parsley for
my taste, but that seems to be
the way it's made around
here. A pair of falafel patties
were enough to convince me
that deep frying is healthy.
The combination of ground
chick peas and parsley was
nicely spiced and fried per-
fectly so that the outside was
slightly crunchy.

The chawirma — spit-
roasted spiced beef — was
spicy and complemented by
slices of raw onion. In the
shishkabob, chunks of beef,
green pepper and onion gave
off a hearty, grilled flavor.
The hummus was smooth and
flavorful with the taste of
tahini. The dinners and a side
order of hummus were served
with fresh, warm pita bread.

Desserts are baklava or
namoora, a semolina cake
drizzled with honey. Turkish
coffee (93 cents) is also avail-
able.

Munjed's is the kind of
place you stop for a quick
cheap meal that's unique. It
doesn't look like it does much
of a family business, but we
took the kids there anyway.
When one decided she wanted
french fries, one of the cooks
peeled and cut up a potato and
fried it for her. It was the kind
of gesture that spoke volumes
for the restaurant. Friendly,
easygoing, and the food is
great.

Lunch for two, with two
dinners, a side of hummus,
two bottles of juice, a can of
apricot nectar coffee, one
dessert and tax come to

**\$19.88. They didn't charge for
the fries.**

Munjed's Middle Eastern menu offers selection, spice

Just blocks away from campus, a delightful Middle Eastern cafe is waiting to be discovered.

Munjed's Middle Eastern Cafe is located on Westcott Street, a location often overlooked by Syracuse University students.

Munjed's cafe is one of the area's ethnic eateries. The menu features about 25 Middle Eastern specialties ranging in price from \$1 to \$8.

LAUREN WILEY ON THE MENU

Customers must order at the back counter, where they can see the staff busily preparing dine-in and take-out orders.

Those who choose to eat in the simple storefront cafe can take their pick of a few small tables that seat about 25 people altogether.

Munjed's is rarely crowded, and service is prompt and friendly.

While waiting for the dishes to arrive, diners can listen to music and peruse photographs from the Middle East.

The main attraction of dining in is being surrounded by the scents wafting from the grills and ovens.

Munjed's offers so many tasty choices

that every visit becomes a new culinary adventure.

The dishes come in a variety of portions and combinations to satisfy any appetite or diet.

Fresh vegetable or meat topped salads (\$2 to \$5) are good choices for light meals or complements to more filling selections.

Delectable dishes

The tabouli salad — a mixture of parsley, bulghur wheat, tomatoes and scallions — has the perfect combination of olive oil, mint and lemon to provide a tangy kick for \$2.80.

The dinner menu includes an array of Middle Eastern vegetarian and meat dishes that cost about \$7 each.

Chicken or beef grilled in a variety of spices can be ordered.

The meats are quality pieces of chicken breast and beef sirloin.

Vegetarians can choose dinners that feature such specialties as spinach pie or babaganouj, which is a puree of char-broiled eggplant, tahini and lemon.

Munjed's grape leaves are also vegetarian, filled with rice, tomato, onion, parsley and seasonings.

All the dishes arrive with a small portion of salad and a basket of pita bread that may be store-bought, but is warm and fresh.

Many selections also come with either two falafel patties or a serving of humus.

Munjed's falafel are spicy patties of ground chick peas that are quick-fried so they are not greasy, but crisp on the outside and moist on the inside.

The humus dip is a puree of chick peas, tahini, lemon and garlic that tastes delicious on falafel, vegetables and pita.

Between the bread

Sandwiches, which range in price from \$2.34 to \$4.20, are the same as the dinner selections but without the extras.

These offerings are smaller in portion and many arrive stuffed in warm pita pockets.

These Middle Eastern specialties can also be ordered as sides that cost from about \$2 to \$6.

Those who want a sampling of the dinner and side dishes can order meat, chicken and veggie combos (\$6.95 to \$8.25).

On Fridays and Saturdays, Munjed's

Munjed's, 530 Westcott St., is open 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday through Wednesday and until 10 p.m. Thursday through Saturday.

To order take-out or for information about Munjed's catering services, call 425-0366.

also serves rice plates with either chicken (\$6.25) or beef chwarma (\$5.95).

The chicken and rice dish is great for those seeking low-fat alternatives. The salads are also perfect for the calorie-conscious if the dressings are ordered on the side.

Diners craving sweet indulgence should sample Munjed's fresh pastries, \$1 each or six for \$5.

Particularly tasty is the baklava: paper-thin filo dough layered with walnuts and baked with sugar and rose water syrup.

Whether diners are seeking dinner or dessert, Munjed's is the perfect place for those craving inexpensive, delicious dishes, but dreading to travel far from home.

Munjed's Makes Marvelous Meals

By Darren Flusche, Jeremy Moberg-Sarver, Chorben Miller

Are you one of those people who spend time on Westcott Street, but only eat at Dorians (A.K.A. Fast Break) or Alkis?... well, we have a suggestion. If you're feeling in the mood for something other than pizza one day, try out Munjed's. It's a charming Middle Eastern cafe, right in the center of Westcott's commercial area.

The inside of the restaurant was cozy but clean, and had a mostly Middle Eastern decorum. With a lute-type instrument in a corner and pictures of camels in another, only two things were out of place. One was a modern looking wall clock, the other was a copy of *Car and Driver* magazine in the lavatories.

Food is prepared right behind the counter, which lends sound and aroma to the atmosphere, along with the miniature palm trees. The experience was unanimously enjoyed by all three of us. Meals included Hommus (chick peas, lemon juice, and tahini), Chawarma (thin cut sirloin tip, charbroiled), and

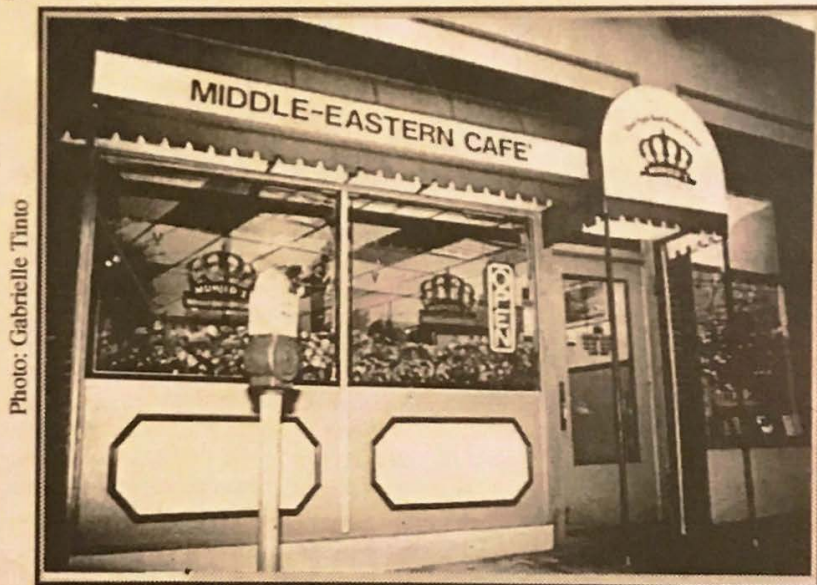


Photo: Gabrielle Tinto

You needn't travel far Munjed's Middle Eastern Cafe is located on Westcott Street.

Souvlaki (beef chunks marinated "Greek-style" topped with a yogurt cucumber and garlic sauce). All sandwiches are served in pita bread pockets, and should be handled with care.

Much to our surprise, each of our meals were in the \$5 range. This included a beverage selection which varied from Clearly Canadian to Snapple to Pepsi, all

in all a decent deal. Oh yeah! And make sure to have plenty of napkins on hand, because it can get kinda messy.

So to get away from the regular group, try out Munjed's located at 503 Westcott Street.

Open Monday-Wednesday
11:00 am to 9:00 pm
Thursday-Saturday
11:00am to 10:00 pm

This article is a review of Munjed's Middle Eastern Cafe. Every two issues of *Common Ground*, we (Darren Flusche, Chorben Miller, and Jeremy Moberg-Sarver) will be visiting restaurants in the area and in turn telling you if they're worth your buck. Bon appetite and enjoy!

Munjed's Well-Seasoned In Middle Eastern Food

By DENNIS HARROD
The Post-Standard

King David may be better known, with high-profile locations downtown in the galleries and up on Marshall Street, but Munjed's continues to hold its own in the Middle Eastern food game, with great food and congeniality.



Munjed's is open from 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. every day except Sunday when it's open 4 p.m. to 9 p.m.

On an afternoon visit, I tried the falafel sandwich (\$2.57) and a side order of babaganouge (\$2.80). The sandwich featured the deep fried vegetable patties whence comes its name, along with lettuce, tomato and cucumber and a tahini sauce. The babaganouge was interesting for its flavor that balanced the slight bitterness of the eggplant with the sweet bite of garlic. The flavors played back and forth with each other, leaving the taste buds in constant flux, like spectators at a tennis match.

Three kinds of baklava are available for dessert: one normal, one with whole pistachio nuts and one with chopped pistachios. Each costs 93 cents. The one with chopped pistachios was good, and

the extra nuts cut the sweetness a bit for those watching their diets. But next time I'd go back to the regular.

Lunch, with the sandwich, side of babaganouge, can of pear nectar, baklava and tax came to \$7.73.

On a subsequent visit, we got food to go in the early evening. Both the lahmajun dinner (\$5.95) and Munjed's platter (\$7.48) traveled well and were still warm and good 30 minutes later.

The lahmajun, which they call a meat roll, consists of spicy ground meat spread over a thin pita that tasted almost like a crepe. Its then rolled up and you can eat it in your hand. With it came a heap of hommus, a dip made primarily of chick peas, and salad that consisted of cucumbers, tomatoes and lettuce with tahini dressing.

Munjed's platter featured a little of almost everything. A couple of falafel patties and a mound of hommus started it off, followed by spicy shish kebab with onions and peppers, chawirma, which is thin, broiled pieces of beef, a nice tabouli salad with plenty of parsley, and grape leaves stuffed with rice and served with a yogurt-cucumber sauce.

The platter is the most expensive dinner. Dinner prices start at \$4.95 for falafel, with most of them in the \$6 to \$7 range. Sandwiches start at \$2.57 for the falafel and work up to \$4.20 for the chicken chawirma.

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