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# Restaurant review: Webster's Fish Hook Restaurant in Northampton

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Though beach weather's only a few weeks away, there's no need to wait for a trip to Cape Cod to indulge a craving for clam shack fare. Webster's Fish Hook Restaurant in Northampton offers all the pleasures of traditional shore side dining. Located just off Route 9 near the Coolidge Bridge, Webster's specializes in right-off-the-boat seafood preparations.

Deep-fried favorites include Fried Haddock (\$13.99), Fried Calamari (\$12.99), and Fried Flounder (\$13.99) as well as "baked stuffed" possibilities such as Shrimp (\$17.99) and Scallops (\$17.99).

Broiled and grilled seafood variations are available, as are choices like Shrimp Scampi (\$14.99), Bay Scallops Creole (\$13.99), or Grilled Homemade Crab Cakes (\$14.99).

Combo meals such as the Fried Fish Hook Dinner (\$16.99) are also on the agenda.

Though Webster's isn't the sort of dining experience that's conducive to a multi-course format, side orders like Fried Oysters (\$11.99), Homemade Onion Rings (\$3.99), and Maine Steamers (market price) can serve as appetizer surrogates.

We started our meal with the two soups the restaurant features.

The New England Clam Chowder (\$3.95) was put together in a more-or-less contemporary fashion -- cream base, cubed potatoes, chopped clams. We like the subtle flavor of onion and celery that



The Republican/ Michael S. Gordon  
Webster's Fish Hook Restaurant on Damon Road in Northampton.

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infused the soup; its not-too-thick texture was also in its favor. We would have, however, appreciated just a bit more clam presence.

"First class" was our reaction to the Lobster Bisque (\$3.99), with its velvety mouth feel and subtle sherry sweetness. Plenty of minced lobster meat left no doubt that the bisque meant to live up to its "lobster" label.

Fried Whole Belly Clams (\$16.99), a New England favorite, is a dish to which Webster's fully does justice. The bivalves are breaded with a traditional corn flour coating; the fat in which they're fried is fresh and clean tasting. We thoroughly enjoyed each bite.

Seafood stuffing as prepared at many area restaurants can often be uninteresting and sometimes downright unpalatable. Neither is the case at Webster's, where the stuffing is buttery, pleasantly seasoned, and generously dotted with minced "sea legs."

Rather than being swaddled with that crumb mixture, Baked Stuffed Scrod (\$11.99) was served over it, a practice that left the stuffing pleasantly crunchy. We liked the presentation, as unconventional as it might have been.

In addition to seafood, Webster's offers alternatives such as Chicken Tenders (\$10.99) and BBQ St. Louis Style Ribs (\$13.99) -- the latter are designated as a house specialty.

The half-rack that served as the centerpiece of our dinner was meatier than the now-widely-available baby back ribs. Plentifully glazed with a ketchup-style sauce, the ribs proved to be adequate though not remarkable. Not much was present in the way of smokiness, and a good deal of salt seemed to dominate the flavor profile.

Dinners at Webster's come with two side dishes.

The fries the restaurant offers are of the coated variety, a food processing innovation we typically hold in low regard. The brand served at Webster's were, however, far superior to others of their sort.

Whole roasted new potatoes and seasoned rice are alternatives.

A salad bar stocked with greens, an assortment of dressings, and several toppings is another side alternative, as is a daily vegetable option.

The restaurant brags a bit about its homemade coleslaw, and we'd say it's an item Webster's has a right to be proud of. Sweetened with plenty of finely minced fresh carrot, it's one of the best slaws we've had the pleasure of encountering.

Webster's is licensed for the sale of beer and wine, offering a small selection of each.

No desserts are available, but during good weather the adjacent ice cream stand, also operated by the Webster family, offers plenty of sweet indulgences.

Luncheon and lighter fare at Webster's include a selection of seafood rolls, sandwiches, burgers, and "lunch special" portions.



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