

BURBANK LEADER

DINING OUT: 'Eats' is delicious, naturally

By Christine Putnam

Let me warn you. Walking into Urban Eats can be a bit of a shock. If you are expecting carpeted floors, upholstered booths and a hostess standing by, take a deep breath and just keep walking across the concrete floor right to the order counter.

This is urban, downtown sophistication, the modern, sterile atmosphere one expects to find in the trendier Santa Monica or Manhattan. There is no one here to seat you, no leather-bound menus. The specials are written on a giant chalkboard next to the counter. Order your food and seat yourself wherever you like. Or ask for take-out. And after a hectic day, who needs vinyl seats and pushy waitresses?

Urban Eats offers a high-quality, fresh and healthy alternative to fast food. It was designed for those of us who panic when our BlackBerrys suddenly do not send e-mails or who dream of being the next Rachel Ray if we just had those 30 minutes at the end of the day. And they have discovered a way to take the guilt out of fast food. These chefs simply take what you wish you had time to cook and make it fast, healthy and better.

Over the glass half-partition around the counter, you can check out the kitchen prep area. There are various fresh vegetables, meats, dressings and other ingredients beside the usual stainless-steel bowls and sharp knives. Everything looks like it was just plucked off the farm. Culinary students from local schools in their chef's whites wait patiently for us to make up our minds. They are friendly and offer to help us with suggestions, but it seems almost unfair to choose only one entree when such young, creative culinary minds are standing by. On this



Urban Eats co-owners Sanjeev Sidhu and Ket Lim with their chef Veronica Rodriquez.

Saturday afternoon, we took our time.

With such talent standing by, it seems odd to make up your own salad, but Urban Eats has a generous list of ingredients, including lettuce, avocado, beets, black beans, grilled asparagus, Kalamata olives, roasted bell peppers, red potatoes, walnuts, marinated grilled steak, slow-roasted turkey, seared ahi tuna, feta, blue cheese, mozzarella and more. Before you go too crazy, keep in mind prices are based on quantity and choices. Adding more than one or two meat selections as well as extra "choppings" can shrink your wallet quick.

When you can't decide or prefer a better bargain, go for a prepared salad. The turkey Cobb (\$7.95), arranged in neat rows over romaine lettuce, with chunks of fresh roasted turkey, avocado slices, crumbled blue cheese, bacon, chives, tomatoes and ranch dressing, comes heaping on the plate. Add a jalapeno corn muffin and you have paradise on a plate.

Generous portions make any of these salads satisfying, but the interesting blend of flavors makes you forget this is actually healthy.

For me, it is always about the sandwiches.

There's nothing better than a quick sandwich that re-energizes you in mind and body. While the grilled cheese on sourdough seems rather plain and effortless for culinary students, the other sandwiches showcase more creative flavors.

The hefty size of the steak sandwich (\$7.85) on a French roll makes it a little tough to eat. Be prepared for that stretch of mozzarella from chin to plate.

My favorite sandwich so far is the herb-roasted chicken breast with Monterey jack cheese, tomatoes, avocado with pesto sauce (\$6.75). The side salad with the flavorful house dressing is a crunchy addition, but I preferred the potato salad, which proved a perfect combination.

With such a great meal before you, natural light beaming in through the windows, and the traffic on Magnolia rushing by, city life seems relaxing, after all.

And the salads, sandwiches and sides at Urban Eats taste good.

Now if this cellphone would just stop ringing.

• **CHRISTINE PUTNAM** can be contacted by e-mail at EatingInBurbankaol.com.