

We need a burger hero

Lunch

ANDY MURDOCH

Reviewer's log, 2:30 p.m.: An hour late for lunch, *Star* test group chirps over the phone like starving chickadees. The brow of this tardy reviewer furrows deeply behind glasses. The poor kids will pass out at their desks because of me. The paper won't get out! The citizens of Toronto will go without news! Must. Act. Fast.

Reaching HQ with a gourmet luncheon seems humanly impossible. Think, man, think! Hmm... fast food... Yonge and St. Clair... we need some Heroes!

Hero Certified Burgers is a year-old burger chain owned by John Lettieri, of the Lettieri chain of coffee shops. This branch opened in September.

A good burger relies on fatty beef. "Certified" emphasizes the chain's use of 100 per cent Angus beef, no preservatives or filler. However, the *Star* finds Hero burger patties (sized four, six and eight ounces) disappointing charbroiled pucks rather than the juicy, hand-formed patties true burger fans prefer. A six-ouncer with the works is \$6.35. The toppings make up for the uninspiring (but 82 per cent lean) meat. Holy brie, provolone, olive or avocado spread — there are more toppings and condiments available than there are gadgets on Batman's utility belt! A word of warning, though: While the multitudinous array of condiments (like the ranch-style Hero Certified sauce or the creole mustard) may bestow special powers unto a burger, choosing too many sauces creates a sloppy mess. Like Spider-Man says, with great power comes great responsibility, so take it easy on the mayo.

Watch out Harvey's, because the *Star* gives a mighty endorsement to Hero's vegetarian Soul Burger (\$4.95). "One of the best veggie burgers I've tasted," said one tester. Truer words were never spoken of a fast food soy product: firm, yet juicy, with a meaty texture that does not compete with true beef, but is flavourful in its own right.

Likewise, it is refreshing to eat a fast-food chicken breast that is not watery or pre-formed. Between the buns of the blackened chicken sandwich (\$5.85) — topped with roasted red pepper sauce and sweet corn relish — is an actual chicken breast with individual flavour and personality. Speaking of buns, the sweet poppyseed-covered egg buns, made by Whole Foods, are quality, too.

Fat, double-fried New York-style fries are dry, unsalted and don't travel well. Fresh, creamy coleslaw has a lovely mustard bite, and the side order of dill pickles makes the mouth pucker happily.

There are three Hero outlets in Toronto and one in Aurora.

Hero Certified Burgers, 21 St. Clair Ave. W., Toronto, 416-925-8703, www.heroburgers.com.

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