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At Tyler's in Raleigh, food and beer for you, Wikki Stix for your kids

by Amber Nimocks



Photo by D.L. Anderson

Fried green tomato, bacon and pimento cheese sandwich at Tyler's Restaurant and Taproom at Seaboard Station in Raleigh

Most people go to Tyler's for the beer. Some go for the food. I go for the Wikki Stix—and the beer and the food. But the Wikki Stix can really push the meal experience over the top.

For those who haven't seen a kids' menu lately, Wikki Stix are long, thin cylinders of wax-coated yarn reminiscent of pipe cleaners, but sticky. You mold them into shapes or wrap them around your fingers or meld the ends together and make a Wikki Stix daisy chain. Tyler's offers a packet to every kid who walks in the door. During my recent dinnertime visits, families with kids—the Wikki Stix set—packed the place. A packet of Wikki Stix will entertain a preschooler long enough for his parents to finish a pint and an appetizer, something I have yet to see happen with a box of crayons and a seek-a-word puzzle.

There have long been rumors of a Tyler's Taproom coming to Seaboard Station next to William Peace University. I had been a frequent Tyler's diner when I worked in the American Tobacco Campus in downtown Durham, and I had grown jealous of Durham, Apex and Carrboro, each with its own incarnation of the local chain. Judging from the crowds I've encountered on three visits since Tyler's in Raleigh opened in December, I wasn't alone in my covetousness.

The Raleigh Tyler's fills the need for both a watering hole and a family dining spot in northern downtown. Seaboard Station has drawn respectable crowds with a good mix of shops and restaurants, including the popular 18 Seaboard and the ever-intriguing J. Betski's, but has long needed a raucous, relaxed eatery with moderately priced food.

Like the Apex location, the Raleigh Tyler's has 80 beer taps, including local and statewide favorites Big Boss, Fullsteam, Lone Rider and Foothills as well as high-gravity Belgians and American craft brew stalwarts such as Allagash

and Anchor Steam.

Freshly painted, oversized beer logos adorn the smooth, 20-foot brick wall opposite the long bar. Blond woodwork, a poured concrete floor and accent walls in soothing tones of rust and mustard help soften the glow from about a dozen flat-screen TVs visible from every nook of the cavernous space. It's loud inside, to be sure. The patio that fronts on the parking lot will no doubt draw beer-drinking crowds this spring.

What's great about the Tyler's menu is that no matter what your dietary orthodoxy—vegetarian, low-fat, gluten-free or just picky—you'll find something you want to eat. Some of it will even rise to the level of delicious. Much of the menu falls squarely into pub-grub territory, but veggie lovers aren't shorted on quality or quantity on the entrée salads. The pear-gorgonzola salad (\$8.50) is great, as is the blackened salmon on greens (\$9.99).


For pub fare, say "yes" to the fried pickle chips (\$5.99), thinly sliced, tangy dill pickles batter-fried and ready for ranch dip, but "no" to the bacon popcorn (\$4.50), which seems to be nothing more than a bowl of popcorn sprinkled with paper-thin Parmesan and bacon crumbles that settle at the bottom of the bowl. Say "yes, please" to the Farmhand Foods Corn Dog (\$5.50 for two, \$8 for four). Locally made sausages are wrapped in batter that puffs to a form a deep-fried pillow around them. The sausages have a peppery bite and a comforting greasiness that is quickly absorbed by the doughy, crunchy coating. Dip them in the accompanying spicy mustard. I tried sharing them with my 5-year-old in lieu of ordering a standard-issue kids' meal corn dogs, but they proved advanced for his palate. "Too spicy!" was the official decree. No matter, this food is meant to be chased by beer.

Neither did my son want any of the seared yellowfin tuna appetizer (\$8.50), which I ordered as an entrée. The tuna slices rest atop crispy, flour tortillas, mild pickles and slaw with hints of roasted sesame oil. The creation falls to pieces at the first bite, which makes it a mess to eat, but it's worth it for the flavors and textural combination. Slightly more manageable is my husband's favorite, the pimento cheese and fried green tomato sandwich (\$8.99): sliced fried green tomatoes, bacon, lettuce and pimento cheese. It's like a Southern fever dream on white toast.

My son did eat some of his own corn dog and fries—not the most nutritious meal I've ever set before him, but considering the creative stimulation he gained from imaginative play with those Wikki Stix, I'm thinking it was a win all around.

This article appeared in print with the headline "A family-friendly bar."

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