



casual

friday

sports

BLACK (& GOLD) FRIDAY

Does living in the Pittsburgh region carry with it the presumption that you must be a fan of its sports teams? I'm only being slightly facetious here as we approach another weekend that includes a Pittsburgh Steelers game, which no doubt means another Friday with lots of people who work in and around Pittsburgh feeling the need to dress in Steelers garb and/or colors.

The rise of dress-casual Fridays has coincided with an increase in the willingness of grown men and women to wear Hines Ward jerseys to work, and it has created the impression that everyone in town is a Steelers fan. Used to be that "black-and-gold days" were reserved for schoolchildren and were only in effect for important Steelers games such as Super Bowls.

But now, all ages participate, and most any Friday before most any game will do. Or, even on a Thursday, if the Steelers are playing a nationally televised game that night. Or, you could bring out the colors for the night the Penguins open their season, or compete in the Stanley Cup playoffs or even for some significant Pirates game. (The home opener, maybe?) OK, so I know the color scheme could be less fashionable (orange and brown, anyone?), but please forgive the less-than-zealous among us for feeling this endless dress-up party is getting rather tiresome.

This outward expression of fan-ness is intended to be fun, and it mostly is, but it also obscures the fact that fans can come in different colors and levels of support. Not being a fan of all things Steelers/Penguins/Pirates isn't wrong, even if some days it sure looks that way. —Bill MODOONO, PM Sportswriter

wine&dine

YO RITA, CHECK OUT THESE TACOS

Good news. Yo Rita, an inconspicuous little tacoria on East Carson Street in South Side, across from Jack's Bar, is rewriting the language of tacos. No, it's not really Mexican, and yes, it used to be Iquana Grill, though all that is left are a few metallic reptiles on the silver wall behind the cash register.

The place is downright simple. But it's clean and pretty, with candles flickering on the bar and Jack's neon lighting up the room like a bright sunset. Marvelous margaritas. Forty seats, six starters, 16 tacos. About the tacos: These are just a template for what Kevin Sousa, one of Pittsburgh's pioneering chefs, can do with fresh ingredients.

So what's a humble little neighborhood tavern doing with a real chef in the kitchen? The phenomenon du jour is one of the hottest spots in town. Sousa, who is getting ready to open his own place, Salt of the Earth, in January, likes heady challenges. When Rita's owner, Jacqueline White, called Sousa out of the blue and asked for an unvarnished consultation, she ended up with more than a professional consult.

Within weeks, they had scrapped the old menu, canned "Wing Night," and for less than \$8, Yo Rita's is now serving lusty tacos that you have to eat to believe. Chicken livers and raw diver scallops. Chorizo with manchego cheese, sweet peppers, pickled red onion, aji amarillo. Black-eyed peas with spinach, corn, epazote, goat cheese and garlic oil. Potato, avocado, shrimp, freshwater eel, braised pork, duck confit, chicken livers. The new fall menu, out in days, will feature walleye pike, fried calamari, trout with caviar, lamb shank and morcilla (Mexican blood sausage).

"Sometimes you just don't want to get dressed up and have a linen napkin," says owner White, who, with Sousa aboard, has attained her goal—"great food, something exceptional, for under \$10."

No mushy beans, no gooey cheese. For the rest of the story, see December's "Dish" in PITTSBURGH MAGAZINE. (Yo Rita, 1120 E. Carson St., South Side. Info: 412/904-3557)

—Deborah McDonald, PM Restaurant Critic

event

GET PSYCHED AT SCAREHOUSE

Want to spook up your Halloween season? Then seek out ScareHouse, a haunted attraction that's been named one of America's scariest Halloween attractions by the Travel Channel and has been ranked as one of the country's Top 13 haunted attractions by Hauntworld magazine. And you don't have to go any farther than Etna, where a former Elks Lodge building has been transformed into a spook-tacular site thanks to special effects, lighting, sounds and costumes.

For one price, you get to experience ScareHouse's three major offerings: Hall of Nightmares, Delirium 3-D and RAMPAGE! That last one has been influenced by "steampunk," described like this: "A sub-genre of fantasy and science fiction that has attracted a growing fan base of alternative artists. The term denotes works set in an alternative Victorian era of culture and technology where steam power is still the prominent form of energy." Cool!

(ScareHouse, 118 Locust St., near the intersections of routes 8 and 28, Etna. Open select dates through Oct. 31; doors open 7 p.m. General admission: \$17. For more info about admission costs and for further details, call 412/781-5885 or visit scarehouse.com.)

event

CIRQUE DU SOLEIL

WILL BLOW YOUR MIND

For years I was skeptical about Cirque du Soleil. The concept of French acrobats in colorful leotards didn't impress me. Then I saw "Mystère," a Cirque du Soleil show in Las Vegas, and IT BLEW MY MIND.

I can't exaggerate how spectacular the Cirque style is: Take the most limber athletes, the cleverest clowns, the strongest strongmen and the most imaginative visual effects, and you get one life-changing evening.

Dull moments do not occur. Your jaw will ache from dropping. One show will feature more flips and dismounts than 20 years of TV coverage of the Olympics.

One pantomime will garner more laughs than an entire season of "Saturday Night Live."

That said, "Alegria" is an unusual show, even for Cirque du Soleil: This dark drama concerns power, tyranny and revolt (a week after the G-20, no less!). Catch this one-week touring production before tickets sell out: "Alegria" continues through this Sunday at Mellon Arena, uptown.

(Oct. 9-10: Fri.-Sat., 3:30 and 7:30 p.m.; Oct. 11: Sun., 1 & 5 p.m. \$36-\$95. Tickets: 800/745-3000, cirquedusoleil.com)

—Robert Isenberg, PM Theater Editor

food find LAS VELAS OPENS

Amidst its revitalization, Market Square welcomes a new, authentic Mexican eatery: Las Velas (21 Market Square, downtown; 412/281-8180, lasvelasmex.com), which opened Oct. 2 to eager lunch and dinner crowds.

The menu is inspired by the cuisines of Mexico City and the Riviera Maya, and the restaurant's owner, David Montanez, husband of Virginia Montanez (a.k.a. PittGirl), made sure it also featured some family recipes, including a dish of spiced steak and shrimp with creamy cilantro-avocado sauce—just the way his mother made it. Other chef/owner favorites include the sopa Cancun, a chicken-rice soup with spicy extras; fish tacos made with tilapia, shredded cabbage, pico de gallo and creamy chipotle salsa; and for dessert, banana-caramel cheesecake fried in a flour tortilla. —Liz Fetchin, PM Associate Editor