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Every day is now Taco Tuesday at Sanctuary, where it's tacos all the time

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Judy Cowling



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Two tacos with a side of coleslaw served with a basket of hot sauces to be used at your peril at Sanctuary in Norfolk's NEON District.

Let me tell you a little story about fudge and tacos.

On the surface, they don't seem to have much in common. But if you ask Trey Hannah of Sanctuary in Norfolk's arts district, one led to the other.

Before opening Sanctuary in March, Hannah owned and operated a Hallmark store in Haygood Shopping Center in Virginia Beach for 27 years. In addition to the regular Hallmark inventory, he made and sold a wide variety of fudge there. Once online shopping became mainstream, he decided it was best to close shop, but he still had a fudge business to run.

Looking for an affordable spot to make his fudge, Hannah was drawn to the artistic energy of the NEON district and found a small space on Addison Street that he thought might work.

After the cleanup phase had begun, an artist friend dropped by to see the progress and remarked that the long, narrow, industrial space would make a great bar.

So, Hannah went into business with that friend, Christian Simmons, whose provocative collages are displayed gallery-style on the walls, and Sanctuary was born.

Wanting to serve something fast and fresh, easy enough to be made without a lot of expensive restaurant equipment, and relatively cheap, Hannah thought of tacos.

Now every day is Taco Tuesday at Sanctuary where it's all tacos all the time. Want just one? That'll be \$3. Two will be \$6 and three will be \$9. Easy math.

My pal Jeff and I went in earlier last week for lunch. Seventeen backless aluminum bar stools were lined up in front of a bar that runs down the right side of this tunnel-like space. Multiple spotlights hang from exposed ceilings to illuminate the large giclée prints of Simmons' originals that hang noose-like from the rafters. Four television screens played different vintage flicks and videos from bands whose music and fashion sense have long been forgotten. A new wooden deck with outdoor seating brings total capacity to 58.

The bartender/server gave us two sheets of paper with pencils to customize our taco order, sort of like the way you order sushi by the piece. First you choose hard or soft shells. Then you choose your protein from barbecue chicken, ground beef, barbecue pork or organic black bean. Next up, choose toppings like lettuce, tomato, onion, jalapeños, cilantro, sour cream, micro greens, cheese, chili lime sauce and lime wedges. Avocado and house-made coleslaw cost an extra 25 cents each.

Our orders arrived all snug in those metal racks that keeps them upright. We each had two tacos and covered all proteins but the black beans. The flour shells were warm, the ingredients plentiful but not overstuffed, and the flavors were tasty. I highly recommend the chili lime sauce and lime wedge with whatever you order.

A basket of hot sauces is offered in case you need the spice. There's a mild one called Hail Mary, and it's bottled especially for Sanctuary with Simmons' collage art on the label. If you dare, you might try Kiss of Death and Toxie's Elixir made by Purple Pam, a friend of Hannah. These are also available for sale by the bottle.

Sure, it could be more gourmet, more authentic street-style, grilled or some other way. But, hey, they are only \$3. Simple, fast and filling. I can easily see that this will be a Sanctuary for those who prefer to hang in smaller groups and not burn a hole in their wallets.

Hannah said his spot is already a favorite destination on the third Thursday of the month for biker night, when the parking lot fills up with motorcycles. It's also the after-party location for local theater groups, Chrysler Museum mixers, and a few area running and bicycling groups.

Sanctuary just opened for brunch on Sundays after Hannah perfected a scrambled egg breakfast taco.

Fudge is still being made on site when Sanctuary is closed (www.fudgegrudge.com). Hannah told me he is working on a dessert taco that will offer a chocolate cookie shell filled with vanilla ice cream and, you guessed it, drizzled with fudge.

Happy hour is from 4 to 8 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays with special drink pricing. Park around back in front of the undulating patterned snake-fish mural.

Open 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Mondays, 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, 11 a.m. to 1 a.m. Fridays, noon to 1 a.m. Saturdays and 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Sunday for brunch.

Sanctuary, 109 Addison St., Norfolk, 757-583-8755, www.sanctuary10x80.com.

Judy Cowling reviews local restaurants. Send tips to turningtables@pilotonline.com.