

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 23, 2006 12:00 AM

Pho Bac

Lunch Counter

Scott Goodwin

Address: 1035 Johnnie Dodds Blvd. (Fairmount Shopping Center), Mount Pleasant

Phone: 849-6743

Hours: Mon.-Thurs. 11 a.m.-9:30 p.m.; Fri.-Sat. 10 a.m.-10:30 p.m.; Sun. 10 a.m.-9 p.m.

I had heard that Pho Bac, an new, unassuming little place in Mount Pleasant, is serving up some very nice Vietnamese food, the rice noodle soup called "pho" in particular.

Opened by the folks who operate Kim Long, the stalwart Vietnamese outpost in North Charleston, it was no surprise to me that they would make good noodle soups at their second location.

The menu looks almost identical to that of Kim Long, which is to say it lists a few appetizers such as Vietnamese egg rolls (2 for \$3.50), shrimp-fried spring rolls (\$4.75), and the classic soft, fresh shrimp and pork spring rolls (2 for \$4); and several different types of dishes, such as egg noodle soups, rice plates, vermicelli noodles (bun-mien) and noodle soups (pho). I've enjoyed several of the rice plates in the past, including the pork chop plate (\$10.25), grilled pork chops with shredded pork skin and broken rice, but on my last trip to Pho Bac, I was on a mission for noodles.

"Rare Beef Slices Rice Noodle Soup" (\$6.95) is a name that leaves little to the imagination, but the name doesn't describe the accompaniments that make pho such a wonderful dish.

The steaming bowl of noodles and exotically seasoned broth gently cooks the rosy redness from the thin beef slices, while one adds his choice of the accompanying side items - bean sprouts, thai basil, cilantro and sliced hot peppers - to tailor each bowl to taste.

Hot peppers were not present on my last side plate - perhaps an oversight - which I remedied with a squeeze of the chili paste from the bottle on the table.

I also sampled the House Special Noodle Soup (\$7.95), which adds chunks of meatballs, as well as the not-for-the-timid tripe and tendon to the slices of beef, and found the additions tasty and not anywhere near as creepy as I thought they might be.

Pho Bac serves sushi (at dinner time only right now, but also coming for lunch very soon) as well as a bunch of exotic shakes, including avocado, taro and jackfruit versions (most \$3.25).

The place's lunch special currently includes a free appetizer with any menu item from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

What better a way to sample the delicious pho (and other stuff) at Pho Bac.