by Mark Rumreich

Pizza Express is well known to anyone who's attended Indiana University in the past two decades. It was launched by IU business grad Jeff Mease and partner Jeff Hamlin in 1982, to bring more creativity and choices to the Bloomington pizza market. Since then, the chain has expanded to five Bloomington area stores, and has recently come to Indy. A store near the IUPUI campus opened in January, and the Broad Ripple location opened this summer.

The Indianapolis restaurants came about when local residents Gabe Connell and IU alums Adam Mears and Jim Siegel approached Mease and Hamlin with the proposal to open an Indianapolis location. They were loyal fans and wanted to bring Pizza Express to Indy with so many Bloomington connections here.

Pizza Express
715 Broad Ripple Avenue
257-7500

Mon-Tues: 4PM - midnight
Wed-Thu: 4PM - 3AM
Fri: 4PM - 4AM
Sat: noon - 4AM
Sun: noon - midnight
www.pizzaexpressindy.com

Walking into the Broad Ripple Pizza Express, the large exposed kitchen dominates the scene. They're prepared to handle a sizable delivery and carry-out business, but there is inside dining. The dining area has a dozen or so tables, is well lit and sparsely decorated.

The Pizza Express menu is focused on one thing - pizza. Except for bread sticks and drinks, it's strictly pizza. Nevertheless, the menu gives you plenty to consider. There are three crust sizes (10, 14 and 16 inches) and three styles of crust: traditional hand-tossed, super-thin and multi-grain. For sauce, there's red, BBQ, pesto and extra virgin. Extra virgin means brushed with a blend of extra virgin olive oil, banana peppers and spices. There are five cheeses and all the popular toppings plus a few rarities like spinach, broccoli, fresh garlic and pecans. You can build your own or try one of the Pizza Express favorites for something different.

Pizza Express near the corner of Broad Ripple Avenue and College Avenue.

We chose a hand-tossed pepperoni & sausage, a thin-crust "Popeye" with fresh spinach, bacon, ricotta cheese and red onions, and a hand-tossed "Big Cheese." The Big Cheese was highly recommended by a friend, and has ricotta, Wisconsin cheddar, mozzarella and fontina cheeses, plus pecans. It has no sauce.

Ten minutes after ordering, the pizzas arrived at our table. The hand-tossed pepperoni & sausage had a chewy crust, spicy tomato sauce, lots of stretchy cheese and tasty pepperoni. The sausage was crumbled a la Pizza King, but it was hard to get a reading on the flavor as it was applied more like a garnish than a topping. But overall, this was a pie that satisfied my pizza urge.

A section of the dining room & kitchen at Pizza Express.

The Popeye had lots of bacon & cheesy flavors in every crispy bite, but in my opinion, it could have used a little more spinach and a little less red onion. The pecans on the Big Cheese provided an interesting twist - the crunch and nuttiness was a nice contrast with the cheeses.

Pizza Express hopes to duplicate its Bloomington success story in Indy. Their wide range of pizza choices, popular specials, loyal following and satisfying pizzas give then a good shot at succeeding.

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Crossword solution

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