



BACON MAC AND CHEESE BITES



NACHOS



MISSISSIPPI MEAT LOCKER PIZZA

Dockside Bar & Grille

By Bryce Parks

Following our cover story last issue on the river-based campground venues of the Rec Group, we thought we'd stick with the marina theme a little more, visiting a popular, yet out-of-the-way, venue that found new owners during the COVID shutdown but came back with an all-new menu for summer. Welcome to the peaceful, hidden-away gem in Mud Lake that was once The View and now breathes new life as Dockside Bar & Grille, a rustic, nautical-themed venue whose motto is "River more, worry less."

In the same way that the owners of the Rec Groups talked about how they came to own their venues, the same story is true of Dockside's owners, Dan and Julie Wolfe, who run the place with their three sons, Ray Jay, Riley, and Reese, with Ray Jay serving as the de facto general manager of the restaurant and marina. While the other boys have separate full-time jobs, there's no question that this is a family endeavor.

"We've been a slip owner here since 1998," explains Julie Wolfe, who joined us as we sampled some of the menu items on a Friday afternoon. "We bought

it in October of 2020 at the urging of our son Ray Jay and opened it in May of this year. We're only seasonal and don't plan on opening in the winter."

Although new to the restaurant and marina business, the family previously owned car washes in the Quad Cities, and as a result, hard work and organization are not new to them. So when tasked with envisioning the menu for Dockside, Julie was quick with an answer as to what she wanted to see happen.

"I know exactly what my philosophy was with the menu," she explains. "I wanted bar food... but I wanted elevated bar food. I don't want something that I can go to every other bar and find. So we hired a chef and consultant, and he understood exactly what I was thinking. He really nailed the menu for us."

We agree. The next-level comfort food we tried was all very good (Tim's note: holy moly, the Meat Locker pizza), and I would not hesitate to order any of the items we had again... and again.

Though Facebook keeps getting worse and worse (and there is always more, and it is always worse), I've gotta say, in this case, it still worked. When I saw the pork tenderloin sandwich special that Dockside posted online, my head, heart, and belly all agreed: "WE NEED TO HAVE THAT. NOW!"

So I'll start there because it was not at all a disappointment, and I say this because we all know that pork Ts can be disappointing. This is a fresh-made, butterflied, tenderized, hand-dipped, and fried pork T sandwich, as they are meant to be made. The spice levels are amazing

but not overwhelming, truly the definition of Julie's goal of "elevated bar food."

"They're thin, but not so thin that you can't see and taste the pork," Julie points out as we try it. And she was right. It's one of her favorites, along with the port mushroom burger, which just happens to also be something we ordered. And the mushrooms were in no way lacking, let us tell you. One of our crew, who shall remain unnamed, was devouring them with the enthusiasm of a lion having just taken down its prey.

"With just a couple of exceptions," says Julie, "all of our fried items are hand-breaded, fresh ingredients done right here. Not pre-made frozen and breaded. It makes a big difference."

The manageably-sized menu is pretty easy to break down into appetizers, pizzas, burgers, sandwiches, and, of course, specialty drinks.

The hand-breaded fare takes center stage in the appetizers. The port mushrooms, onion straws, artichoke hearts, and pickle chips all benefit from this extra layer of do-it-yourself service, and those items find their way onto burgers and sandwiches across the menu. They even hand-cut and hand-batter their chicken tenderloins and serve them with house-made BBQ, buffalo, or orange glaze. (Yes, it matters. Try them and find out.) The driftwood fries certainly diverge from the beaten path. Julie wanted something sweet, so the driftwood fries are akin to funnel cake-style fries... and addictive, to be sure.

We had nachos, too. You can get them with chili or pulled pork. They come loaded and also have their house-made fried

jalapeño coins on top. Add in cheese curds, a giant pretzel, and bacon (or jalapeño!) mac and cheese bites, and there is quite the array of food on the appetizer menu.

Ten specialty pizzas offer up flavor combinations that you don't find on every other pizza menu. First, choose hand-tossed or a thin crust before narrowing down your options. Their signature pizza is the Docksider, and it's a chili dog pizza. Before you knock it, try it. They're onto something here. Why have we not seen this before?

More favorites include the Captain Boss, with a roasted garlic parmesan cream-based sauce, topped with fresh spinach, grilled chicken, bacon, artichokes, sun-dried tomatoes, and portobello mushrooms pulled together with a premium cheese blend. The Poker Run pizza is a BBQ pulled pork, red onion, and onion straw-topped pie, blending sweet with savory. The Horizon features Canadian bacon and sauerkraut (add pineapple if you're one of those people); the White Cap is chicken, bacon, and ranch; and the Heat Index is similar to the White Cap but adds in buffalo sauce and jalapeño coins. Dockside's kitchen also just added a unique Reuben pizza that even has marble rye croutons. The Loaded Barge is a more traditional "everything" pie, and you can guess what's on the Mississippi Meat Locker. We had one. It was as advertised! (We're not joking. Arby's ain't got nothing on this; Dockside HAS THE MEATS.) Of course, you can always get one your own way. After all, you are the captain of this pizza at this dock!



PORK TENDERLOIN



PORT MUSHROOM BURGER

We didn't try it, but they highlight a pizza skillet on the menu: Take one of four Dockside pizzas and bake it into a skillet without a crust. Keto-eaters, your ship has come in!

The burger selection is highlighted by the port mushroom with swiss, the signature fried mushroom chips, and a parmesan peppercorn sauce. The Streamer goes for full-on BBQ, with bacon, pulled pork, and fried onion straws; and the Heat Stroke keeps the bacon and piles on the pickled jalapeños sautéed in ghost pepper sauce and topped with, of course, the house-made jalapeño coins. Have a beverage (or three) handy!

"Sandwich" options—and we use quotes because, well, is a chili dog a sandwich?—include the just-mentioned chili dog, it's on the sandwich menu, and it's big. Joining it are the traditional Reuben, and the amazing pork T we talked about up front. You can also get those amazing handmade chicken tenders on a hoagie bun with your choice of sauce. And it all comes with their branded Highway 40 fries, which are french fries... albeit with a much cooler name.

Don't forget in all of this that at Dockside, you are dining within a marina restaurant. So, the views are awesome, and the big deck has a lot of seating in the sunshine or under an umbrella, where one of those signature blended summer drinks will come in real handy. Their very own Funky Monkey is a blend of Island Oasis piña colada, Skrewball peanut butter whiskey, and Bacardi banana rum. Somehow, it works! The Captain Flat is

ice cream, Captain Morgan, and root beer. The Tornado Twister is refreshing, with Island Oasis piña colada, mango, and Bacardi white rum. So many more include the frozen sangria, Miami Vice, mudslide, and other favorites. So many cocktails, so much cold perfection on a hot, lazy river day. They also make their own signature Bloody Mary mix on site. What's a marina without a good Bloody Mary, after all?

"We're big-time river people. We grew up on the river," Julie reminds us.

They want their guests to have the experience they want to have when visiting a place like this. And, without putting too fine a point on it, this is quite a place. The Wolfes may say "rustic nautical," but that doesn't mean that this is some old river dive. Dockside is still a very new, clean, modern, and well-maintained venue.

"This is a lot bigger undertaking than I originally thought it would be," says Julie. "I have great family and friends who have helped get us through this first year, especially in the kitchen. Pretty much my whole family works for me in some capacity. I have my two sisters, my mom and dad, and their families. They're a lot of help. It was my son Ray Jay's idea to buy the venue, and every once in a while when I see him, I want to kick him in the butt.

"But I've met a lot of people, and that's great. The live music on weekends is a lot of fun, too."

Being a weekend kind of place, they are only open Thursday from 5 to 9 p.m., Friday and Saturday from noon to 9 p.m., and Sunday from noon to 8 p.m. Watch their Facebook page as each week they

will put one sandwich and one pizza on special. Think of it as a way to help make sure you try everything, rather than finding a favorite and sticking to it.

"We wanted to do breakfast this year," says Julie, "but the difficulty everyone is having with finding enough staff put those plans on hold. But a full breakfast menu is prepared and waiting to be unveiled in 2022. I also have an idea for a moonlight menu with select foods after 9 for late-night crowds, like chili dogs during live music."

Tiny homes will also be coming to the marina, as well as pontoon boats, and, of course, a big public campground and park are both right next door.

"We have permanent and transient camping sites as well on our property," says Julie. "It's been going well. We view this as a destination spot because it's one way in and one way out. We hope to get ATVs, motorcycle riders, car riders, and visitors from the river at our transient boat docks. We have plugins and everything for that."

The only downfall I could see was that I don't think the main restaurant area is wheelchair-accessible. It's on the river, and it can flood, so naturally, you have to keep the important stuff up high. But surely they'll set you up nicely on the lower patio if that's needed.

An accountant by trade, Julie is doing the books and the paperwork on the off days then gets right back at it for the weekend guests. So, clearly, after the first season is in the books, she'll be ready to enjoy one of those tasty

mixed drinks like they serve at Dockside... only she's going to let someone else make it for her! But, hey, lucky you, you can go get one now. And, as always, tell whichever member of the family is behind the bar that 365ink sent ya! ■



Dockside Bar & Grille

22500 GOLF LAKE RD,
DUBUQUE (MUD LAKE)
563-552-2332

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