



Frannie's Barbeque

By Bryce Parks

365ink visited Boaz BBQ on Elm Street when it first opened back in September 2020. Well, a lot has changed since then. Actually, everything has changed since then except for the peach wraps for dessert. So, it's high time we go back with you to take another turn down barbecue lane at Frannie's Barbeque. Also, don't think for a second that this is our first time back since then. That's just silly. Oh, we've been here!

Now under new owners and with a new name and a new location, there's really not much about the place that harkens back to 2020 except for continuing a tradition of former owner Donnie's love of incorporating peaches into his recipes.

The current captains of this BBQ ship are the husband and wife team of Antywone and Francén (Frannie) Sanders. Yes, I did thankfully ask them how to spell their names. And no, as if there wasn't enough confusion with the new ownership of an existing eatery, they are not related to "Sugar" Ray Sanders who is also known for BBQ in Dubuque but now does it as catering and at events only. I guess there's just something about being a Sanders that makes you good at BBQ. And if you're a Colonel, then maybe chicken, too.

These Sanders are recent transplants from Minneapolis, MN, in 2019. Antywone came to Dubuque to manage Discount Tire, and after visiting the community and liking what she saw, Francén gave it the thumbs up. As a contract project manager for finance, mainly in the hospitality industry, she was able to be mobile for her profession.

Both from big families, they are not just foodies but also big believers in the social community side of sharing great food. Upon getting to Dubuque, barbecue is one thing they were not finding much of in our area.

Antywone eventually met Donnie, owner of Boaz BBQ, and loved the food—and the peaches—but noticed some inconsistency. It's so hard with BBQ to know how much to make and when. He pulled Donnie aside and told him that he too is a grillmaster and that if he needed help or a business partner to let him know. Fast forward six months later, and Donnie asked if the Sanders wanted to buy the business.

"We discussed it, and I'd never eaten there before at this time. I pulled up and saw it and thought that can't be a BBQ joint? From the outside, I didn't love it, but I loved Donnie's concept and what he was trying to do inside. We went ahead and decided to buy the business in November of 2021."

"We tried to stick it out on Elm. We tried to buy the location to revamp the entire building but could not come to an agreement with the landlord and were challenged on space. So, I made

some calls to some awesome people here in Dubuque who connected me with some commercial properties available, and we laded here at 1850 Central, and we reopened in June 2022."

Whereas Boaz was ready to go when they took over, this new place was not ready to go. The former billiards hall, bar, and grill needed some love.

"There was a kitchen, but we had to put in new equipment and a grill, and we're still not done. We have plans to build in back on White Street for a safe place to cook outside. So there's more to come from inside and outside. But there was such a demand to open from the community, and I didn't want to lose this energy we had, and we're both now in this full-time. So we opened."

As I noted earlier, they changed just about everything. Sometimes it's hard to tell with recognizable staples like barbecue, but while brisket is brisket and beans are beans, not all beans are the same. And no two barbecue grillmasters do things exactly the same way. It's an art after all or everyone would do it.

"Donnie's peaches was a nice concept, and the peach wraps are the only thing we did not change. We changed the BBQ sauce to our own recipe that could be used on multiple meats."

Sauce is a fickle thing. You have to dial it in to make it work for a number of meats or else you need to have multiple sauces. They've opted for a sweet, smooth sauce without a burn to be amenable to a number of applications.

The sides are also mostly handmade or augmented to become Antywone and Francén's own twist on everything. The baked beans still have peaches in them but now with a tweaked recipe from before. You'll still find hand-cut fries, coleslaw, potato salad, and homemade mac and cheese. And man, the hushpuppies are addictive. Frannie was missing hush puppies, and they are one thing that is very hard to find in Dubuque. She tested many different varieties to find one she loved, and that's what you'll find on the menu now. Don't get just a half order; you'll kick yourself later.

I suppose we should stop messing around and get to the main event: the meat. They're working with brisket, pulled pork, pork and beef tips (the beef is a tri-tip cut), very spicy hot link sausage, chicken quarters, turkey legs, whole chicken wings, catfish, and shrimp. We've had most all of it now, and we couldn't possibly go wrong on any decision. It's a long, slow-smoked barbecue that really needs no sauce to back it up, but it's there if you want it. And thankfully there are a number of combos so you can sample more than one meat with each visit.

Frannie's Barbeque is very picky about their meat and catfish. Frannie would rather not serve catfish than source it from somewhere she doesn't know and approve of. So for a little while here, they've had some trouble keeping catfish on the menu. But when it is available, the seasoned cornbread crust is light and flaky and works so well with the fish and the shrimp, it



basically demands a side of hush puppies. And you should have a peach wrap, right? I mean, if it's the only thing they didn't change a bit from the Boaz menu they inherited, it must be pretty good? It is.

Francén says they are the hardest critics of their own food but notes that they also want to take in everyone's feedback. If it's too much or too little or not seasoned right or too dry, they take that all into consideration. They want honest input so they can keep it great or make it better if they can.

"We're not here to just sell you food; it's a connection. That's where we came from. Food for us was how the family came together. You can call it soul food or family reunion food, whatever you want to call it. That's the time that allowed people to come together and feel good and relax and forget about their worries for a moment and have a great meal."

Getting open ASAP was a priority, so now that the doors are open, expect to see continued additions and evolution of Frannie's Barbeque as things move ahead.

"We do want to add to the menu with food and events. We want to host a Margaritas and Mimosas event. So you get a drink but with a chicken wing and a beef tip and a cheese stick. (Sort of like BBQ tapas). It's very big in large cities. We want to introduce that to Dubuque.

"I also still want to repaint inside and brighten it up and have community walls featuring the faces that come in here. Plus, I want to have a section for kids and games. We want to incorporate that so when the kids are done eating their mac and cheese but mom and dad are still enjoying their ribs, it gives the kids something to do. We want it to be a community thing."

Word of mouth has been stronger than anything else to credit for their growing army of avid fans, which speaks most loudly about their quality and their welcoming atmosphere. Frannie is a bit worried about advertising too much too early and not being able to meet the demand that comes with that. Baby steps.

"Food is a very sensitive thing. You want it to always be fresh, and you want to have staff on hand that is in your own mindset about how things should work. It's about personal communication with our customers, not just food. So I want anyone working here to put that first if they're going to be in the team."

"We're also looking to do buffet style for our churchgoers on Sundays after services soon. Then, we'll also offer greens and sweet potatoes, more traditional Southern comfort foods. Look for that a couple of times a month. And Frannie's Barbeque family reunion events will target families with group games, competitions, and movies with a meal served family-style on a platter to give it even more of an at-home feel."

Well, I feel pretty at home already. I don't know how often I can go before it gets weird and Frannie starts treating me like real family and puts me on dish duty, but I'm willing to test the line a bit. With my dogs's vet right across the street, I have some extra excuses I can make. ■

FRANNIE'S *Barbeque*

Frannie's Barbeque
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Facebook: Frannie's Barbeque
Hours: Tue, Thu & Fri: 11:30-2 PM & 4:30-8:30 PM; Sat: Noon-9 PM; Mon, Wed & Sun: Closed

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Thank you to Jim Massey, our favorite beer connoisseur, who did the honors with Bob to pour our first beer!



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