

# THE SMOKESTACK

BY RICH BELMONT

Perhaps you didn't know there is a place in Dubuque where actors, dancers, artists, poets, intellectuals, musicians and community organizers go to share their ideas and showcase their talents.

It is at the corner of Seventh and White Streets and it is called, appropriately enough, The Smokestack.

A work in progress to be sure: sort of a bar, kind of a casual restaurant, a comfortable meeting place, an intimate theater and a mini dance floor all inside a very old building attached to a big sixty foot high smokestack.



The Smokestack is owned by Scott Cornwell and his wife, Susan Price. They are the ringmasters of this circus they say has its own theme: Life is a performance art piece. So come visit and stay as long as you like. Order world class cocktails and delicious food off an eclectic

menu while discussing the topics of the day or enjoying artists, musical groups or theater company performances in a historic urban-industrial venue in downtown Dubuque. The Smokestack is open to everyone and anything as long as it's legal!

Scott and Susan have been together for almost 20 years. They moved here from Brooklyn, New York in December, 2013. Scott had been a renovation contractor and was a paramedic in the New York Fire Department for over 20 years. He is also a musician and plays several instruments including slide guitar, bass guitar and banjo. Susan was a historian and an event planner and did fund raising for non-profit educational organizations.

In mid-July 2013 they went on a road trip to visit their ancestral roots. Susan's family settled in Grundy County, IA from the 1850's to the 1880's. Scott's family moved to New York City from Prairie du Sac, WI when he was nine years old.

While on a side trip to Dubuque they discovered this derelict old building with a seemingly out of place smokestack. They say the building spoke to them. It became their calling and they felt they had no choice but to make it their mission to bring it back to life. They went home and sold everything they had and moved to Dubuque where they didn't know a single person.



That building has a fascinating history. Susan used her talents as a historical researcher and started digging into the building's history, literally. Even before there was a building the land was a Native American Burial Mound and was then used as the site of the first execution in Iowa in 1834. The Jefferson

House Hotel was built on the ground and operated from 1856 to 1918. It became the Sanitary Dairy Company and was a dairy processing plant from 1920 to 1943. Dairy processing required boilers hence the need for the smokestack.

In later years it became a warehouse for auto parts and then remained vacant wasting away until Scott and Susan rescued it. I encourage you to go to their website:

**SmokestackDBQ.com**. There you can read the entire history and see photos of some of the artifacts Scott and Susan unearthed during the renovation. They began rebuilding the place inside and out in November 2014, and opened The Smokestack on July 3, 2015. Remodeling continues: a new rooftop terrace has been added and a second one is planned. The second floor is being remodeled and the intimate lounge area upstairs is a work in progress. In fact, the main entrance which is the red alley door is also being remodeled so you must enter temporarily through the 7<sup>th</sup> St. door.



The beautiful mural on the alley side wall was painted by Corban Cold Lundborg. He is a painter, illustrator and photographer. He is from Minneapolis and he has a studio there: Cold Studio (**Cold-Studio.com**). He is a graduate of the Minneapolis College



of Art and Design. (Fun Fact: Corban started painting when he was 14. He was a graffiti artist and stopped doing graffiti after he was arrested one too many times).

Many local Dubuque organizations have already discovered The Smokestack is an inviting place for meetings and public and private events. A couple of these groups are:

- Green Drinks (**GreenDubuque.org**) – People in the environmental field meet the 1<sup>st</sup> Wednesday of the month for discussions in an informal setting.
- LGBTQ+ (**CODBQ.org**) – People dedicated to catalyzing and sustaining an affirming community for LGBTQ+ community members and allies. They sponsor the All Ages Games Night at The Smokestack the 2<sup>nd</sup> Thursday of every month. Everybody is invited to play board games.

Entertainment is on tap at The Smokestack sometimes on a daily basis. The talent is amazing and there is something for everyone. Visit The Smokestack website for a complete listing of coming events.

It is fitting that a temple to the arts would have a menu of exotic cocktails. I have had a couple of these prepared by the very talented and friendly bartender, Nacole Meyer. Some of these are:

- The Luna – Gordon's Gin, fresh lemon, St. Germain Liqueur and bitters. The menu says it has a moon-glow ethereal refreshing elegance. Yeah, I didn't know what that was either. It means it is a light, refreshing drink.
- Moscow Mustang – Tito's Vodka, fresh lime, ginger syrup. They say this is a super charged Moscow Mule. It's a Mustang, not a mule, right?
- Sazerac – Bulleit Rye, bitters, Absinthe. (Fun Fact: some people claim this is the oldest known American cocktail originating in pre-Civil War New Orleans).
- Kenny Ryan – John Jameson & Son Irish Whiskey, Green Absinthe and Cointreau. This is the traditional Irish cocktail named for Scott's and Susan's friend from the Canfield Hotel.



You might have noticed both the Sazerac and the Kenny Ryan are mixed with Absinthe. It is an anise flavored libation sometimes mistakenly referred to as a liqueur. It is actually a spirit since it is not bottled with added sugar. Absinthe has often been portrayed as a dangerously addictive psychoactive drug and hallucinogen. By 1915 it had been banned in the US and many other countries. A revival began in earnest in the 1990s after it was proven that all the harmful effects of absinthe were complete fiction.

The menu cautions all the signature drinks are "Wicked Strong Cocktails." These drinks are meant to be enjoyed by slowly sipping not chugging!



The Smokestack's menu is unusual and a diverse compilation of delightful tastes. It is a collaboration between Scott, Susan and Chef Andie Donnan. You might already know Andie. She is also the On-Site

Manager of the Dubuque Farmer's Market, she works at the Honey Hill Organic Farm and completed the Master Gardening Program at Dubuque County Iowa State University Extension and Outreach. She was the Deli Manager at the Dubuque Food Co-Op and has also been a cook at several local restaurants including: Diamond Jo Casino, Champpps Americana, Shot Tower and Caroline's Restaurant in the Hotel Julien Dubuque.

The Appetizers are all designed to be shared. Some of my favorites are:

- Crispy Spiced Garbanzos – these are chickpeas – a pea like seed of a plant native to the Mediterranean and possessing a nutty flavor. They are deep fried with a special seasoning to make them spicy.
- Veggie Rangoon – wonton purses of artichoke, spinach and a homemade blend of cream cheese, asiago and mozzarella.



- Fried Brussel Sprouts – this is my favorite and just like the menu says they are surprisingly addictive. Deep fried sprouts are seasoned with Chef Andie's secret blend of spices.



There are two salads:

- Simple – a spring mix of lettuce leaves with sun-dried tomatoes, Kalamata olives, asiago and garlic-lime vinaigrette.
- Susan's – dried cranberries, blue cheese and a balsamic vinaigrette. This one has Pepitas (peh-PEE-tahs). These are hulled and roasted pumpkin seeds.

Flatbread Pizzas are New York style and are big enough for two or three people. These are not at all typical pizzas. There are three of them:

- Red & Green – pesto, sundried tomatoes, capicola and mozzarella.
- White & Green – ricotta, spinach, garlic, peppers, onions and mozzarella
- Mediterranean – hummus, spinach, red onion and asiago.



The current menu is rounded out with 3 sandwiches:

- Cubano – roast pork, hickory smoked ham and dill pickle.
- The Chicken – roast chicken, peppers, onions, asiago and mozzarella.
- Ham & Swiss – a straight up ham and Swiss with Dijon mustard on a really good ciabatta bun.

All food is served until last call so no one goes home hungry.

Scott and Susan feel very fortunate to have been embraced by the local arts community. They look forward to expanding and continuing to share their experiences, their highly unusual building, and their Smokestack with the good people of Dubuque.

## THE SMOKESTACK

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**Hours:** Wed-Sat: 4 PM-2 AM; Sun-Tues: Closed

**Dining Style:** Come as you are

**Noise Level:** Conversational

**Recommendations:** Specialty Cocktails, Crispy Garbanzos, Veggie Rangoon, Fried Brussels Sprouts, Mini Corn Dogs, Flatbread Pizzas, Cubano and Chicken Sandwiches

**Liquor Service:** Full Bar

**Prices:** \$2 to \$9

**Pay Options:** Cash, Debit, All Credit Cards, NO Checks

**Accessibility:** Red Door Alley Entrance

**Kids Policy:** No Menu, Booster Seat Available

**Reservations:** For parties over 6 please

**Catering:** No • **Take Out:** Yes • **Delivery:** No

**Parking:** On Street. Parking in lot is only for tenants