

Bennigan's on the Fly Dubuque

By Bryce Parks

I admit, when I first heard it was coming, my first response was, "There are still Bennigan's?" I have not seen one in some time. I assumed they went away with Ground Round, rest its soul. And in many ways they did, or almost did. It's a rather interesting story.

But before we get too deep into the history, let me answer the first question everyone wants to know... "if it's 'On the Fly,' can we still dine in?" You'll be happy to hear that they have indeed been given the go-ahead to serve the full Bennigan's On the Fly menu fresh out of the kitchen for dine in at River Rock Kitchen & Tap at the Holiday Inn Dubuque. Yep, you can order from both menus at the same time in the same place. Problem solved!

But back to the road that got us here... Created by the Pillsbury Corporation in 1976, Bennigan's established itself as a fern bar in the '80s (look it up). It was acquired by a company in 1989 that later merged with Guinness and had to spin off Bennigan's because there were laws that prohibited a liquor distributor from also owning a liquor retailer. The new parent company eventually filed for bankruptcy in 2008, which forced the 150 corporate-owned Bennigan's to close as a result, and it also took down a number of the 138 franchisee-owned locations as well.

Acquired by a private equity firm, Bennigan's was saved, or at least on life support. By May 2011, new CEO Paul Mangiamelo planned to introduce a new logo, store



MONTE CRISTO



OH, BABY™ BACK RIBS

prototype, financial and franchise models, an updated menu, improved marketing, adding a catering operation, and a new attitude. In 2015, he and his wife, Gwen, eventually bought out the company from the equity firm, and as Legendary Restaurant Brands, LLC, is rebuilding the brand. With just nine dine-in locations in the U.S. (and 14 abroad), you can understand why you may not have seen one in a while, with the only ones anywhere nearby in Urbandale and Clear Lake, IA and Elgin, IL.

But in the pandemic climate, the introduction of Bennigan's On the Fly is making the most of a new reality we're all experiencing. The Dubuque location is just the third Bennigan's On the Fly in America. One other is in Iowa and one is in Florida.

Getting back to its roots, the concept of Bennigan's was and is an Irish pub-themed American casual dining restaurant. Only now, the theme exists more in the menu and the names of the dishes as, well, there is technically no themed location to visit for dinner.

The arrival in Dubuque makes sense once you understand that some of those remaining and revitalized Bennigan's in America are located in some of the 75+ properties owned and managed by Kineth Hospitality Companies, with operates the Holiday Inn in downtown Dubuque. Voila, there's your connection.

If there's one thing most anyone who knows anything about Bennigan's knows about, it's the legendary Monte Cristo sandwich. Some kind of food alchemy occurred when they managed the batter dip and triple-decker turns, ham and cheese sandwich, and sprinkle it with fairy dust. Errr... I mean powdered sugar.

We get the lowdown on what to expect from the new "On the Fly" franchise in Dubuque, housed inside the Holiday Inn next to Five Flags Center, when we went to the man in charge, Holiday Inn General Manager, Elliott Rhoad.

"The initial concept started out after COVID hit and everybody is doing takeouts, right? River Rock is a great restaurant, but during COVID, it scaled-down so much and wasn't made for that kind of market. We saw the 'ghost kitchen' trend take off in places like New York City, and that's where we started out. We obviously have a kitchen ready to go, and if there are menus to go, you can tool-up quickly to start offering a new service without having to provide space for a whole new storefront. Our parent company,

Kineth, already partners with Bennigan's in other Iowa locations, so the fit was natural."

As time went on and Elliott talked to people in the community, they were telling him, "To go is great and we want that, but we also just want to come eat at Bennigan's!" People have been eating out of to-go containers for a year and really want to go out and have dinner again. At the same time, they can branch out to the populations who are not yet ready to get back into the normal swing of things and still create business for the restaurant in this not-yet-over pandemic climate.

"So we worked out a deal with the Bennigan's people that we are technically a Bennigan's on the Fly, but we can serve those dishes fresh to our patrons in River Rock Kitchen & Tap at Holiday Inn. We've basically blended the menus, so 18 of the Bennigan's favorites are now on the River Rock menu, along with old favorites from River Rock like the famous chowder and the ribeye."

Being so close to Five Flags, it's already been a huge hit as that venue's shows come back and crowds want access to a good, convenient dinner before the performance or drinks after. And with famous Bennigan's items like the Monte Cristo, getting it fresh and crispy to your table will always be a hundred times better than delivered simply because nothing can stay crunchy when it gets the chance to reabsorb moisture as it travels. Problem solved. Dine in and get it like it was always meant to be enjoyed.

While the to-go and dine-in menus are only available after 5 p.m. right now, lunch to go is going fire-up the first Monday of April. The Bennigan's on the Fly website (benniganonthefly-dbq.com) features their menu, an online ordering system for carry-out meals, and third-party delivery options.

So I guess we should finally tell you about the food, right?

Recently we were able to dine in and try a few things, and I'm happy to say we liked everything we were served. Of course, we had to have a Monte Cristo. It's been years since any of us had done so. Honey wheat bread is layered with tender ham, roasted turkey, and Swiss and American cheeses. Then, it's batter dipped (yes, batter dipped) and gently fried and coated with powdered sugar. It sounds heavy and potentially greasy, but I promise you it is not. The coating is thin, and you can easily pick it up without getting greasy fingers.

2551 County Rd Z | Sinsinawa, WI 53811 | 563.495.7336

Sandhill Farm

www.sandhill-farm.com | sandhillfarmlife@gmail.com

Pick-up locations in Peosta, IA, Dubuque, IA, and at our farm!

<h3 style="color: #d9534f;">2021 CSA Shares</h3> <p>Featuring:</p> <p>Tomatoes + Shallots + Green Onions Garlic + Sweet Peppers + Leeks Sweet Potatoes + Celery + Salad Mix Lettuce + Spinach + Carrots Parsnips + Brussel Sprouts + Broccoli Radish + Beans + Peas + and more!</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Market Share 30 Weeks May–November</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Choose your own credit! \$50-\$400</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Full Season CSA Share 19 Weeks June 15–October 19</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Weekly, Bi-Weekly, & Monthly options</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Standard sizes starting at \$360</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Fall CSA Bi-Weekly (3 Boxes) Oct. 26, Nov. 9, Nov. 23 \$175</p>
--	--

SINSINAWA MOUND COLLABORATIVE FARM

It's served with red raspberry preserves for dipping. Note that you can partner half a Monte and soup or salad if you aren't a big eater. Still a serious meal, but manageable.

But I digress. Let's talk starters, as they come first. And if you're like me, sometimes they ARE the meal.

You'll recognize things like traditional and boneless wings and quesadillas, but they also get more creative with their Hogan's Egg Rolls that are anything but Asian, with a Southwestern flavor featuring chicken, black beans, sweet corn, and house made pineapple sweet pepper cream sauce. The Broccoli Bites give the tiniest hint that you were trying to eat healthily, but let's just admit that you like both broccoli and fried foods. It's okay, you're among friends. And we enjoyed Sheela's Sriracha Shrimp. Twelve sweet shrimp hand-dipped in Bennigan's secret batter recipe and fried to a golden brown then tossed in spicy Dynamite dressing. Finally, the famous potato soup topped with Colby cheese, bacon pieces, and chives is famous for a reason.

The burgers were good too, featuring a big beef patty and a number of options for toppings plus a generous side of fries, though I guess you could get a side salad. The B.O.M.B. Burger had a bourbon-infused bacon jam over melted American cheese and was topped with crispy fried haystack onions. Sold!

Two sandwiches can save you from going over the Monte Cristo cliff and still make you smile. The Club is basically a Monte without the batter-dipped treatment but add bacon, because... duh! And the also-famous Turkey O-Toole is not complex, but while it's delicious it doesn't need to be,

with freshly sliced turkey breast, melted Swiss cheese, and smoky honey Dijon dressing, all served on a pretzel bun.

In time for Lent, two fish dishes include Finn's Beer Batter Fish and Chips and a grilled salmon fillet which we tried ourselves, served with herb rice pilaf and broccoli sauté. Try it with the passion fruit glaze. It was a good size serving of salmon.

The menu is rounded out by Bennigan's Signature Chicken Tenders and a wrap made from the same, a Cajun Chicken Shrimp & Pasta, and last but far from least, the Oh, Baby™ Back Ribs. Yes, they're trademarked. Savory slow-smoked to "fall-off-the-bone" tenderness, the ribs are brushed with zesty BBQ sauce and finished on the grill.

Sides for any entrée can come with Kicked Up Coleslaw, herb rice pilaf, homestyle french fries, broccoli sauté, or roasted garlic mashed potatoes.

I didn't get to try the salad yet, but I'm a Cobb salad lover, and it looks like Kilkenny's Country Chicken Salad is right up my alley, or whatever Irish word means alley. Crispy or grilled chicken with garden greens, bacon, Colby cheese, eggs, and tomatoes are served with smoky honey Dijon dressing.

Top off any meal with New York Cheesecake or Brownie Bottom Pie, just because you're in charge and you can.

Whether you call it a cloud kitchen, ghost kitchen, or virtual kitchen, Holiday Inn is proud to serve up your favorites from Bennigan's and offer a new dine-in and to-go dining option in Dubuque. Stop in and tell Elliott and the crew that 365 sent you! ■



Bennigan's on the Fly Dubuque

450 MAIN ST, DUBUQUE, IA (INSIDE HOLIDAY INN)

563-690-5600

BENNIGANSONTHEFLY-DBQ.COM

Hours: Sun–Thu: 5–9 PM; Fri–Sat: 5–10 PM;

Lunchtime carry out starts April 5

Ordering Options: Dine in, carry out, and delivery

SUBMIT YOUR DINING SUGGESTIONS!

DO YOU HAVE A FAVORITE RESTAURANT YOU WOULD LIKE TO SEE US VISIT? PLEASE SEND US YOUR REQUESTS, SUGGESTIONS AND COMMENTS!

EMAIL: DINING@DUBUQUE365.COM

Zero Proof Cocktails

By Hy-Vee Nutritionists Megan Horstman (Asbury) and Amy Cordingley (Locust)

We all know it's important to stay hydrated. Adequate hydration can help with everything from flushing out toxins to keeping joints lubricated. And when it comes to hydration, nothing beats plain old water. But what can you do when you want something a little more exciting? The number of beverage options can be overwhelming. And what about happy hour?

One category that has been rising in popularity is nonalcoholic drinks. People are looking for ways to enjoy happy hour without the depressant and dehydrating effects of alcohol. Enter the mocktail—a nonalcoholic version of popular cocktails.

Creating a mocktail can be as simple as leaving out the alcohol. Or, you can look for specific mocktail recipes (spoiler alert, there are a lot of them online). But the same holds true whether your drink includes spirits or not—the mixers are usually the culprit when it comes to calories and sugar. Check out the Hy-Vee HealthMarket for a variety of low-sugar mixers, including flavored sparkling water. And look for other creative ways to add flavor, such as fresh fruit and herbs.

Get started with the recipes featured below. If you're drinking a mocktail with added sugar, stick to one or two and then switch to a lower-sugar option, such as a flavored sparkling water. And check out the March issue of Seasons magazine for more mocktail recipes. Cheers! ■



Cucumber-Basil Nojito

MAKES 1 SERVING

Ingredients

- ½ cup finely chopped cucumber
- 2 oz simple syrup
- ½ cup lightly packed fresh basil leaves, plus extra for garnish
- ½ oz fresh lime juice
- Cucumber slices, for garnish
- ½ cup cucumber-and-lime-flavored mineral water

Directions

1. Combine chopped cucumber and simple syrup in a small saucepan. Simmer over low heat for 10 minutes. Remove from heat.
2. Stir in 1/3 cup basil and fresh lime juice. Cover and let stand for 10 minutes.
3. Garnish inside of an 8-ounce cocktail glass with cucumber slices. Fill with ice. Strain mixture into prepared glass. Top with mineral water. Garnish with additional basil leaves, if desired.

Source: March 2021 Seasons magazine



The information is not intended as medical advice. Please consult a medical professional for individual advice.