



BARA-BURGER



IKONOMOPOULOS STEAK BITES



MAIN STREET NACHOS WITH BEEF

Baraboo's on Main

By Bryce Parks

Travel Dubuque just announced the results for their very scientific online poll to find the best burger in Dubuque. After a week of voting, the people have spoken, and the winner is... Baraboo's on Main! And I imagine right now many of you are saying, "Barawho's?" How does a fairly new restaurant win best burger? Is it really that amazing?

Now, obviously, "best burger" is a very subjective contest. Last week, Foodie Garage was mentioned as one of the best burgers in Iowa (the only one noted from Dubuque) by some statewide contest while barely notching a top ten finish right here in the local poll. So who's to say? But somewhere in this search for greatness, the numbers for Baraboo's

kept creeping up, passing venerable venues like the Dubuque Mining Company, 7 Hills Brewing Company, Paul's Tap, Thumser's 19th Hole, and the Dog House Lounge, to take the top spot.

Was it aggressive marketing? Absolutely! But is it more than that? Does the new kid on the block have a legitimate claim to be called the best burger in Dubuque? There's only one way to find out! Lucky for you, we're willing to do the research. We sacrifice ourselves for your knowledge. SPOILER ALERT: The claim is totally legit!

When Chad Miller and Christina Rose Miller bought Skinny Maginny's at 345 Main St. from Larry Ikonomopoulos in late 2022, the idea was to create a *Cheers*-style vibe with great food where people could feel comfortable and relaxed and have a great meal while watching the game or socializing with friends.

"I want to have *the* neighborhood tavern, says Chad. (It literally says so on the awning out front). "Bars and taverns are different. Taverns are nicer and have more upscale food. A quaint, calm, peaceful place to enjoy dinner and lunch."

And for Miller, it was, above all, time for him to finally have a place all his own.

No newbie in the local food scene, Chad has put in his time in for nearly 30 years, from the Ground Round to Buffalo Wild Wings, to the Yardarm and most recently, right across the street from his own place at the Vault Restaurant in downtown Dubuque. And when previous owner Larry put out the idea of Chad buying the business from him, at first Chad thought he was joking. But in time, he realized that the opportunity was just what he and Christina were looking for.

"I wanted to infuse the things I've learned over the last 27 years and put my own stamp on my place," explains Chad.

Upon taking over and developing their own brand and vibe, the first thing to change was the name. "Baraboo's" is in honor of their Labradoodle of the same name. What didn't change was the great staff Larry had already brought together. The Millers kept the team in place and built from there.

So, on a street filled with great burger options, how do you stand

out? You just have to be good. And Baraboo's is unquestionably good.

So about those burgers. They have a few signature burgers as most places do, but when you get to the heart of it, it's the flavor of the burger itself that needs to carry the load. And this one does. It's a fresh, never-frozen, half-pound mix of brisket and ground beef. And as Chad says, "We don't mess with it. We just flip it and never smash it." What they're flipping it on is some kind of grill because you can taste the smoky char flavor, and it makes all the difference. It tastes like they brought it in off the Weber in the backyard. It's super juicy and kind of loose, and that matters. It's just great beef. Where you take it from there is up to you.

Their published specials include the "Mozby" Cheddar Melt with cheddar pub cheese sauce and sautéed onions or maybe check out the Bacon Blue Burger with a house-made blue cheese sauce and crumbles, crispy bacon, and fried onion straws. My wife has the Frisco Breakfast Burger and loved it even without the sourdough toast as she's gluten free. It



NAKED BONE-IN WINGS

comes with cheddar cheese, a fried egg, bacon, and jalapeño raspberry jam. They were out of the gluten-free buns but will usually have them. She didn't mind and had it bunless. It's easy to forgive them when they make fresh-cooked potato chips to go on the side. And those are gluten free too (cooked in a shared fryer, though)! The battered steak fries are also awesome if you want to go the fry route. And nothing goes with fresh-made chips (or fries) like house-made ranch. No damn bottle ranch here, and it makes all the difference. Their house ranch is fantastic!

Thursdays are Burger and Brew day where you can try the signature burger of the day with any brew they have on tap for \$15.

The great "tavern" food goes well beyond the burger. Chad says the quesadillas and nachos are big hits. So, we had to try both of those, and we see why. The quesadilla is not reinventing the wheel, but it's packed with goodness and plenty for a meal all by itself. The nachos were served on a plate of freshly fried flour tortilla chips instead of corn, and our beef version of the Main Street Nachos were dreamy with white queso, shredded cheese, olives, tomatoes, scallions, and salsa and sour cream on the side with an optional guac addition. They come in chicken also, or try out the buffalo chicken version.

Baked pretzel sticks, fried pickle nickels, and Wisconsin cheese curds join the nachos on the apps list, and Chad noted during our conversation that "apparently we have very good wings." And he did not lie. They were great. I always get mine plain with sauces on the side. They were not breaded, but they seemed like they had a dusting or something because the crispness of the outside seemed like more than what can be achieved with just the wing alone.

But Chad swears they're naked. He also says they're baked. I say there is voodoo involved. Baravoodoo! #copyrightbryce. Try them with BBQ buffalo, teriyaki, raspberry jalapeño, or Thai chili sauce. In fact, just get two orders right away and save yourself the hassle with ranch or blue cheese and celery on the side, naturally.

As a nod to friend and Greek former owner, Larry Ikonomopoulos, who still owns the building the business resides in, they kept the famous Ikonomopoulos Steak Bites, named for Larry. They are divine! Super tender seasoned tenderloin chunks on a bed of Greek salad with toasted garlic Parmesan bread.

The wraps and sammies include a BLT that features sourdough bread with cheddar and pepper jack cheese, and a two wraps: Caesar chicken and chicken bacon ranch wrap (don't forget how good the ranch is!) Italian beef lovers will be happy as well and yes, it comes with giardiniera. And in honor of Baraboo and Mozby's dear friend, The Baxter is a crispy chicken sandwich with all the fixings.

They also have two chicken-based salads and a revolving soup of the day. Sunday specials can also bring new offerings to the plate like this past Sunday's Blackened Chicken Florentine Penne or recently, grilled salmon, a Reuben, or a surprise new signature burger revelation.

They've added a number of signature mixed drinks to the bar menu as well, and none are more notable than the smoked old fashioned. Not only can you see the cloud of smoke roll up after they remove the glass dome from the drink, but also, for a few minutes, the tavern smells a little bit like a campfire.

Between our first visit two weeks back and the two visits this week, one thing changed for sure: the crowd. They had a fine lunch following two weeks ago



THE BAXTER

when we first visited. It was pretty low key and relaxing. But two day ago, it was jam packed for lunch, and the staff was doing their darndest to keep up. Maybe because of the new No. 1 burger raking. Who knows, but good for them. Nonetheless, lunch was kind of long which is understandable considering what they were facing with the crowd and a limited staff. Just keep that in mind if your lunch break is limited. Then last night for dinner, they were also full at 7:30 p.m. We got the only open two seats left. It was a Friday night, and on top of the Iowa women's game playing on the TVs, the last two No. 1 seeds in the Men's NCAA Tournament were both losing at the same time, so it was rather loud and energetic. So depending on what's going in, it can be a speakeasy or a party atmosphere. But always friendly, clean, and comfortable.

Happy hour runs Monday through Friday from 4 to 6 p.m., and they have karaoke three nights a week, for better or worse, I guess, depending on how you roll. But everyone will always feel welcome here. They fit right into the lower Main Street scene, and I see a great future for them.

Best burger? We'll let you decide. But we have to give credit to Mrs. Miller, Christina Rose, a West Dubuque High School teacher by day and who handles the marketing and promotions at the tavern. She got them to No. 1 on the burger rankings. If you came in during the week of voting, they had a QR code right on your table asking for your vote, and it worked. And since the burger here really is completely excellent, it's not even a lie. What the No. 1 raking really got them was attention, and that's the magic sauce for any new venue. New people are showing up to try the "best burger" in town, and it's been a real shot in the arm for the business. And deservedly so.

Naturally, tell them Bryce sent ya! And then ask them why they have a big "How I Met Your Mother" sign on the wall. I know, but I'm going to make you find out on your own. Enjoy! ■



Baraboo's on Main

245 MAIN ST, DUBUQUE, IA

563-231-3226

BARABOOSONMAIN.COM

Hours: Mon-Tue: 11 AM-2 PM; Wed-Sat: 11 AM-2 AM; Sun: 11 AM-6 PM

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