



JEFF CREMER HELPS CUSTOMERS AT THE MEAT COUNTER



GRAB AND GO SANDWICHES



TURKEY AND DRESSING SANDWICH



HEAT AND EAT MEATS



HOMEMADE SAUSAGES



BBQ BEEF SANDWICH

Cremer's Meats

By Danny Fairchild

Jeff Cremer is one of the hardest-working people I've ever met. And I know Bryce Parks, so that should tell you something.

My acquaintance with Jeff is fairly trifling. I first met him while I was working for Area Residential Care. He'd already had a relationship with ARC because he would let the people we served come in and work, stocking and facing shelves. I asked him to be a food vendor for many fundraising events, and he rose to the occasion every time. When I got my Kitchenaid meat grinder attachment, I asked if he could point me in the direction of sausage casings so I could make my own bratwurst. He just gave me some casings. Whatever

he had left in his little tub. He told me how to handle them and wished me well. It was kind of like Mean Gene Green tossing me his jersey. By the way, if you're interested in sausage casings, you can usually find them in the hunting section of just about any farm and fleet store. Anyway, that's about the limit of my acquaintance with Jeff. But every time I bump into him, or he notices me in the store (and he usually does), he does a double take and says hi. I don't think he knows how he knows me, but he knows me. He knows it's important to know his customers, and I'm here to demonstrate that he does.

I've never witnessed Jeff when he wasn't hard at work. He's always doing something to keep his little-grocer-who-could going and to uphold his family's legacy. Do something for me right now: Go look at Cremer's Meats Facebook page. Look at the cover photo. Cute, isn't it? Nice familial feel, eh? See the guy in the background on the phone? That's not an employee. That's Jeff. Working.

I like to think that Jeff WAS posed for the photo, but then the phone rang. And they knew he could be a while, so they just went ahead with the picture.

The purpose of this column is to talk about the ready-made sandwiches and how delicious and versatile they are, but first, I want to give props to Cremer's Meats. Here are my credentials: As a young man, I worked at my hometown IBP plant sorting the sides of beef after the USDA inspectors graded them. I wouldn't say I could be a USDA inspector or anything, but I have kind of a feel for the quality of meat. I've seen everything from Prime beef destined for the carving station to "beef" destined for the cannery. Shortly after that, I worked behind the meat counter at a Fareway where I furthered my meat education. I'm not calling myself an expert by any means, but I've got a feel for meat. If you're not effing around when it comes to meat... when the meat matters... Dubuque is lucky enough to have Cremer's. The place has been open forever and has the

contacts and relationships to get some of the best meat you can buy. No lie.

As much as I have a "feel" for meat, do you want to know who knows more about meat than I do? Jeff and literally anyone who works for him. THOSE are the experts. You want to know what cut to buy? With a few questions, you'll have it all wrapped up and ready to go, and it'll be better quality than you can get just about anywhere. ANYWHERE. They know their stuff, and they take pride in giving you what you want with a high level of quality. Oh, you're looking for a ham? Don't get them started on hams. Bet you didn't know how much there is to know about ham.

Basically, if you value hard work and expertise, you should reward Cremer's with your business.

But let's talk about those tasty little sandwiches, shall we? When you go in, just keep walking towards the back. Right before you get to the back meat counter, look to your right. Here you'll find delectable little culinary canvases in the

form of bunned deliciousness like turkey and dressing sandwiches, BBQ pork or beef, sloppy joe, Italian beef and cheddar, burgers, and a whole lot more.

I ain't originally from around these parts. When I moved here, my reaction to learning of turkey and dressing sandwiches was typical of any other transplant: "What, like a bread-on-bread sandwich?" I stand by that question, but I've since learned the answer, "Yes! A bread-on-bread sandwich! You got a problem with that?!" You've probably had Cremer's turkey and dressing. It's pretty much the gold standard. And the good news? You don't have to have them only during the holiday leftover season! Or at your nephew's Eagle Scout ceremony. You can turkey-and-dressing it up every single day for just \$1.99 a pop! And then you get to play with it! I did. I heated up a skillet, removed the crown of the bun, and put even more of a Maillard reaction on the turkey and dressing by searing it face down. It was like a bubble and squeak sammich. That extra browning was nom. But honestly, you can pop any of these sandwiches into the microwave for about 30 seconds, and you'll have yourself a steamy good sandwich.

The beauty of these sandwiches is that they're good all by themselves or as a starting point to make it your own. Yeah, turkey and dressing is delicious, but have you tried frying it? That's an extreme case of playing around. Usually, it's about adding condiments. Again, you don't NEED to use condiments for ANY of these sandwiches if you happen to be eating these on a car trip or ill-supplied break room. But there's almost nothing you can do to these sandwiches that won't make them even better according to your tastes. It's like they're magic sandwiches that only take in what makes them better.

Let me give you the best example of this. The BBQ beef. Most places would throw a chuck roast in the crockpot, add barbecue sauce, and call it BBQ beef. And that's fine. But Cremer's isn't going to consider it barbecued beef unless the beef has actually been barbecued. So, they smoke their own beef and pork. As for sauce... there's little more than a hint of sauce and/or rub in the BBQ beef. So if you ARE craving that barbecue sauce taste, it's there. But the charm is in the smoke. But here's the thing: If you have a favorite barbecue sauce, feel absolutely free to use it here. The already saucy taste is already there, but it's also a flavor that bows to any other sauce you want to put on it. I used my family's sauce recipe. It's better for pork or chicken, but damned if it didn't make the beef magical.

All these sandwiches are delicious just the way they are. But if you want to throw some cheese or some ketchup

and mustard and pickles on them, you should have no fear of doing so.

Another good example: The Italian beef and cheddar. The Italian beef on this sandwich was so moist, it almost tasted like the sandwich was served wet-style. But it's not. The bun is still handleable. The foxy layer of cheddar helps keep things tight, too. I'm here to tell you... so delicious. If I had any giardiniera on hand, I'd have been in heaven. Don't even need an au jus or similar, and I'm not kidding. But I got daffy and put some hamburger dills on it, and damn was it good.

It's not surprising. The Cremer family has had generations to develop their recipes and to know what their customers want. I tell you, friends, buy your sandwiches for the week. Freeze them or keep them refrigerated. You'll have a better tasting sandwich for cheaper than any fast food joint.

You can trust it. Jeff works too damn hard to put out crappy food. ■



Cremer's Meats
 731 RHOMBERG AVE, DUBUQUE, IA
 563-583-6589
 CREMERSMEATS.COM
 Hours: Tue-Sat: 11 AM-5 PM;
 Sun-Mon: Closed;

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COLOR-BY-NUMBER YOUTH WINTER READING CHALLENGE

JANUARY 2-31

Visit the Children's Help Desk to pick up your color-by-number sheet to get started on this month-long reading challenge for children and teens. Participants will earn a free book and a kid's coupon from program sponsor Red Robin to keep the good vibes going. All color-by-number sheets must be turned in by Wednesday, Jan. 31, in order to receive a prize.

ADULT WINTER READING CHALLENGE

JANUARY 2-31

For ages 18+. This challenge can be completed through the Beanstack app (dubuque.beanstack.org) or with a physical bingo card available at the first-floor Recommendations Desk. Start the challenge by reading *Where We Come From*, a picture book for all ages available to read on Hoopla. Earn squares on your virtual or physical bingo cards by logging your reading minutes from books that explore themes of family, history, or identity. Completing one regular bingo will give you an entry into a prize drawing at the end of the challenge. Limit of one entry per person. Physical bingo cards must be submitted to the Recommendations Desk by Feb. 2. Virtual bingo cards will be automatically submitted through the Beanstack app.

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