



BARREL HOUSE PORT OF DUBUQUE

BY RICH BELMONT

If Augustin A. Cooper was alive today I believe he would be pleased with the newest occupant of his Headquarters Building at the corner of Main and Third Streets in Dubuque. Mr. Cooper was the owner of Cooper Wagon Works, a highly successful manufacturer of wagons known all over the world. According to the Encyclopedia of Dubuque by 1905 AA Cooper and Buggy Works covered approximately 27 acres in downtown Dubuque. The Headquarters and showroom building was originally constructed in 1895 and is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

Today that building is the latest in a small but growing chain of restaurants called Barrel House. And just like the original inhabitant of Main and Third Streets Barrel House will come to be known far and wide as one of those brew houses revered by its patrons for its large selection of beers, signature cocktails and excellent food.

The first Barrel House opened in July, 2011. It was called Barrel House 211 because it was located at 211 East 2nd Street in Davenport, IA. The owners got the name because at one time breweries were called barrel houses and sold a lot of beer. Right now Dubuque's Barrel House offers 16 local craft beers, 21 American craft beers and 13 domestic beers. The web address for all the Barrel Houses is BarrelHouse211.com in honor of the original bar's street address.

Right now Dubuque is the latest Barrel House location and I am sure other locations will follow soon. Currently the other ones are in Moline, Davenport downtown, Davenport uptown and Silvis, IL which is also in the Quad Cities Metropolitan area.

Barrel House was created by Michael DeWitte and his silent partner Jimmy Holt. Mike was General Manager of Carlos O'Kelly's in Dubuque and Food and Beverage Manager at Grand Harbor Resort and Waterpark. He went on to be General Manager of Granite City Food & Brewery in Davenport. His partner Jimmy is the owner of All Around Town Landscaping in the Quad Cities.



When the owners decided to turn the Cooper Wagon Works Building in Dubuque into their 5th location they knew they were going to need an experienced and talented General Manager. That's where Mike Bries comes in. He is a native Dubuquer who started cooking when he was 13. As soon as he was old enough he opened Breezer's Pub in

Dubuque. He sold it in order to attend Scott Community College Culinary School in Bettendorf, IA. He returned to Dubuque to intern at the Grand Harbor Resort and Waterpark where he was promoted three times in one year to Prep Cook, Supervisor and Kitchen Manager. This is where he met and worked alongside Mike DeWitte. He then became the Culinary Manager at the Dubuque Olive Garden. From there Mike purchased the Athenian Grill and operated it for 4 years. During that time he also started Michael Paul's a fine dining establishment on Asbury Road. Most recently he was General Manager of Mellow Mushroom in the Coralville Ridge Mall.

Many people in Dubuque noticed the Barrel House Opening Soon sign in Dubuque. It was there for several months while extensive renovations were done to the space and staff was hired and trained. Mike Bries says there was no end to the details that had to be taken care of. He was finally able to open on December 29, 2016. He says he couldn't have had everything ready for business without the help and expert assistance from the owner Mike DeWitte. He also relied on the talents and knowledge of Abraham Blair, Director of Operations and David Serrano, Corporate Culinary Trainer.

Barrel House Port of Dubuque is the first location to serve Sunday Brunch and made-from-scratch pizza. Even the pizza dough and sauce are made on the premises.

There is seating for 250 patrons who can watch any of the 12 flat screen TV's while they enjoy wine, cocktails or all the different beers including 16 on tap.

Helping to keep the whole operation running smoothly are several experienced supervisory personnel including Jeff Brewer, Manager, and a native Dubuquer and Hilda Rodriguez, Floor Supervisor, who is from Platteville. In fact a bar and restaurant of this size requires a big staff. In a short time the payroll has grown to 117 employees.

This includes several mixologists who keep the special signature cocktails flowing. A couple examples of these house specialties are described this way:

- Razz Baron Bomber – Raspberry & citrus dive bomb your palate packing River Baron vodka ammunition
- Tippy Coffee – Rumchatta, Absolute vanilla vodka and milk with coffee ice cubes
- Red Bull Margarita – Jose Cuervo, Triple Sec, your choice of flavor Red Bull, salted rim with a lime



- Some specialty drinks designed to keep you warm on cold nights include:
- Salted Caramel – Godiva Crème de Cocoa, caramel vodka, milk with a caramel and pretzel rim
- Blood Orange Mule: Blood orange puree, Tito's Vodka and ginger beer

The Barrel House cuisine is classic American Grill. It is as delicious as it is creative and unusual. It consist of Burgers, Pizzas, Sandwiches, Chicken Specialties and Mexican American favorites.

The appetizers are not only fabulous they are fun to eat. A few examples are:

- Wing-It – A half-pound of Drummies tossed in either buffalo sauce or chipotle BBQ sauce
- Portobello Mushroom Fries – These are my favorite! Portobello slices are hand battered, fried and served with a tangy Caesar sauce
- Barrel House Poutine – French fries topped with crumbled Italian sausage and fresh cheese curds then baked and topped with a demi glaze.
- Barrel House Pretzels – Soft pretzels basted in garlic butter sauce and served with jalapeño queso sauce and homemade mustard sauce.

All appetizers are half-price from 9 p.m. to 1 a.m. every day.

There is a different soup every week-day. The soup of the day is posted on the sign board in the entryway. You might find for example Wisconsin Cheese, Chicken Tortilla, Cheeseburger Soup or California Medley Creamy Vegetable just to name a few.

The burgers are first rate. They are made from Braveheart Black Angus Beef. This is an expensive beef because the cattle are raised on a 100% US grain based diet then finished on Midwestern corn. Braveheart is well known in the restaurant industry for excellent taste, high quality, one quarter inch maximum trim and consistency.



Take advantage of the kitchen staff's creativity and order one of the 9 half pound burgers from the current menu. These include:

- Chophouse Black & Bleu Burger – Peppercorn seared patties topped with bleu cheese crumbles, fried onion straws and horseradish sauce.
- California Burger – Fresh sliced avocado and provolone
- Cowboy Burger – Fried onion straws, Sweet Baby Ray's BBQ sauce and cheddar cheese on an onion bun
- Diablo Burger – This one packs some heat! The burgers are basted in Sriracha sauce and served with fried jalapeños and pepper jack cheese.

Or you can build your own burger by following these 4 steps:

1. Pick your size: either Firkin quarter pound, Hogshead half pound or Big Butt three quarter pound. (In case you are wondering the designations come from British units of measure for a specified volume of beer and are used here just for fun).
2. Pick your bun from 5 choices
3. Pick your cheese from 6 choices
4. Pick your toppings. This could be hard because there are 13 possibilities!



The Pizzas are all really good. They are on a very thin crispy crust made from homemade dough. They are available in medium (12 inch) or large (16 inch) sizes. Here again you can order one of the 12 Barrel House creations or you can choose BYOP (Build Your Own Pizza)

and request any of the 18 toppings. I noticed there are three different types of pepperoni: regular, spicy, and cup & char. I had to look up this last one. It's a quality pepperoni encased in an edible collagen casing. When the pizza is baking the heat causes the casing surrounding each slice to shrink up and form sort of a cup. This keeps the delicious fat from running off the pizza.

There is such an assortment of House Specialties on the menu you really can't enjoy all the scrumptious flavors of the Barrel House until you have visited a number of times. Some examples include:

- Fish & Chips – A half-pound of Atlantic Haddock loins hand battered and fried and served with a house made tartar sauce

- Chipotle Steak Burrito – A flour tortilla is stuffed with chipotle lime steak, Mexican rice and cheese and topped with Baja enchilada sauce
- Avocado Chicken – A juicy chicken breast grilled to order then topped with several large slices of avocado and provolone cheese
- Pulled Pork Sandwich – Slow roasted pork tossed in a sweet BBQ sauce and topped with

- onion strings. All pork lovers must have this sandwich!
- Chipotle Chicken Salad – The chicken salad is tossed with chipotle peppers to add a special flavor then served on wheatberry bread
- Beef Bacon & Mush Melt – This is a true gourmet sandwich. Thinly sliced seasoned beef with sautéed onions, smoked bacon and sautéed red wine mushrooms. Swiss cheese is placed on top inside a ciabatta roll. (Fun Fact: ciabatta (ch'yah-BAH-tah) is an Italian word for slipper and is used to describe a slipper shaped loaf of bread).

The Sunday Brunch is really good and it's getting more sophisticated every week. I recommend you start off with Bottomless Mimosas or Bloody Marys. The Brunch is a two sided buffet line with self-serve chafing dishes.



There are the usual pancakes, hashbrowns, bacon, sausage patties, fruit, mini muffins and even breakfast and dessert pizza slices. There are classic Scrambled Eggs and the Scramble of the week. Last week it was Ham & Cheddar.

The real fun happens when you visit the Creation Stations:

- Prime Rib Carving Station – the carving chef will cut you a super thin slice of succulent beef roast either rare or medium to your liking.
- Omelet Station – the omelet chef will fold into your omelet any of your favorite ingredients. I always ask for a Denver Omelet that has diced ham, onions and green peppers. Then I ask him to throw in cheese, mushrooms and tomatoes.
- Egg Benedict Station – this is a station you don't see in many buffets because it is difficult to get it right. You can request a classic benedict with a poached egg on Canadian bacon on an English muffin slice covered with Hollandaise sauce. You can spice it up by asking for the Roasted Red Pepper Cheese sauce. Or you can even order an Eggs Florentine Benedict by asking for the Spinach and Artichoke dip and mushrooms.

Here are a few tips to enhance your experience at Barrel House:

- Ask your server about desserts. There are usually a couple of luscious sweet endings to a great meal. On my last visit there was Turtle or Key Lime Cheesecake.
- There is a page in the back of the menu for specially priced Lunch Specials.
- When you have to do lunch in a hurry know that pizza by the slice and appetizers can be served quickly.
- Become a Rewards Member! Barrel House is part of the nationally known Five Stars Rewards Program. Scan the QR code and then you will receive one point for every dollar spent. Accumulated points can be redeemed for all kinds of neat prizes.
- If you are planning a special event Barrel House is a cool place for it. Contact Makayla Langston at Barrelhouse211Events@gmail.com or call her at **563-639-8794**.

BARREL HOUSE

FOOD THAT LIFTS YOUR SPIRITS ■

BARREL HOUSE PORT OF DUBUQUE

299 MAIN STREET, DUBUQUE, IA 52001
563-845-7928 • BARRELHOUSE211.COM

Hours: Mon-Sat: 11 AM-2 AM; Sun: 9 AM-2 AM;
Sunday Brunch: 9 AM-1 PM;
Kitchen Open to 1 AM seven days per week

Dining Style: Casual

Noise Level: Conversational

Recommendations: French Fry Nachos, Portobello Mushroom Fries, Pretzels, Pub Burgers, Pizzas, Chipotle Chicken Salad Sandwich, Pulled Pork Sandwich, Firecracker Shrimp Tacos, Ranch Chicken Salad, Avocado Chicken, Steak Chimichanga, Sunday Brunch

Liquor Service: Full Bar, Signature Cocktails, Large Brew Selection

Prices: Appetizers: \$5.50-\$9.50;

Pizzas: \$10.25-\$17.95; Entrées: \$6.99-\$13.25

Pay Options: Cash, Debit, All Major Credit Cards, NO Checks, ATM on premises

Accessibility: Ramp to side door on 3rd Street

Kids Policy: Menu, High Chair, Booster • **Reservations:** Yes

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

Parking: On Street, Municipal Lots back of building and across 3rd Street. Municipal Parking Garage entrance on Main Street