



BOB’S BITCHIN’ BBQ

BY RICH BELMONT



When we foodies dream about really awesome BBQ we think we should make plans to visit some of the great BBQ cities. We want to head out to Austin, TX; Kansas City, MO; Lexington, NC; Greenville, SC; Dodgeville, WI or Memphis, TN. Wait a minute! Did you just read Dodgeville, Wisconsin?

Yes, my foodie friends, you got that right! Dodgeville is the home of Bob’s Bitchin BBQ and it rates right up there with some of the best BBQ places in the nation. I learned about it from Jack Kirkby, an amateur Galena, IL historian, who is 81 years old and regularly goes on road trips to check out interesting and exciting restaurants.



Bob’s Bitchin BBQ is owned by Bob and Judy (call her JJ) Page. They opened in their original location on November 1, 2012 and almost immediately they were inundated with huge crowds demanding their smoked meats for both lunch and dinner. After 27 months they closed for 6 weeks in order to move into a bigger location one block down the street.

Bob and JJ purchased the building at their new location. It was built in 1905 and was originally Hahn Billiard Hall. It was a Ben Franklin store for 60 years and then a True Value Hardware for another 25 years. In order to turn the space into a bar and restaurant they hired a general contractor, Design Structures of Middleton, WI. JJ did the interior design herself. The graphics, menu design and art work was developed by their daughter Sarah Page, a graphics designer residing in Madison. The kitchen was designed by Bob and his son, Ryan Page, who is a cook in the restaurant.



The new location has the look and feel of a big corporate chain restaurant even though it is privately owned and operated. It seats 90 people so the new space is double the original location. The number of people served, however, has tripled. So has the staff: there are now over 42 employees directed by the very capable Floor Manager, Sheri Johnson who is a native of Dodgeville. Each week over 1,500 pounds of brisket, over 1,500 pounds of pulled pork and more than 200 full racks of ribs are served. Hard to believe in the 30 months they have been open Bob and JJ have served over 200,000 people!

The restaurant is easy to get to. From the Dubuque-Wisconsin Bridge go north on US-151 to exit 44 onto WI-23 and you are on Iowa Street. It only takes about 45 minutes.

The success of Bob’s Bitchin BBQ is amazing but it should come as no surprise. Bob Page is 57 years old and he has been in the food industry since he was 19. He started working in a Red Lobster and it is there he met JJ. They have now been married for over 35 years. Bob, who is from Sauk City, WI graduated from the Culinary Arts Program at Madison Area Technical College. He was then appointed Assistant Chef at the now closed Middleton Station Restaurant. The Chef resigned only two weeks after Bob’s arrival so he was promoted to Head Chef. After that he managed a Pizza Hut for a while and then became a manager at Aramark Food Services. He managed private dining facilities at American Family Insurance and a private dorm near UW-Madison. In the seven years before opening his BBQ restaurant he was with Sodexo, a multinational food services company contracted to operate the cafeterias of Lands’ End, the Manufacturer and International Retailer of casual clothes headquartered in Dodgeville, WI. Bob was responsible for all of the Lands’ End employee cafés.

JJ Page, who is from Lake Mills, WI, retired from UW Hospital where she was a billing specialist for over 30 years.



Bob began developing BBQ sauces more than 30 years ago. He used to give them as gifts to his Lands’ End employees. In July of 2011 Bob and JJ began bottling their sauces and selling them at farmers’ markets in Mineral Point and Monona, WI. Soon after, they got the idea to open a BBQ place as a showcase for their sauces. Years ago one of their employees said their BBQ sauce was the most “Bitchin” sauce she had ever tasted so that became the inspiration for the restaurant’s name.

Bob finds it a little ironic he is now in the BBQ business because it wasn’t his passion in life. He loved experimenting with BBQ sauces but it took him many years to realize he had a talent for smoking meats. He simply needed something to put his sauces on so he acquired the skills necessary to become a master smoker.

He developed his own Dry Rub and Seasoning which is made from paprika, cumin, chili powder, dark brown sugar, seasoned salt, light brown sugar, garlic powder, thyme leaves, black and cayenne pepper and onion powder.



He currently offers eight Signature BBQ Sauces. They are:

- ORIGINAL: A traditional hickory smoked sauce.
- BREWBQ: Made with New Glarus Brewery Spotted Cow Ale.
- CAROLINA: A mustardy, vinegary sauce.
- HABANERO: With habanero peppers but it’s really not that hot.

HONEY CHIPOTLE: Smoky chipotle peppers mellowed with clover honey.

MANGO RED PEPPER: Sweet with a little heat.

RAZZBERRY: Fruity and sweet and tastes like raspberries.

RBQ: Sweet with a little fizz. Made with root beer from Sprechers Brewery in Glendale, WI.

The rub and the sauces are available for sale in the restaurant, online from their website, and from several Wisconsin retail stores listed on their website.

The sauces are bottled by Wisconsin Innovation Kitchen in Mineral Point, WI which helps fund the Hodan Center for Disabled Adults.

True BBQ requires smoked meats. So I must admit I was surprised the first time I visited Bob’s Bitchin BBQ and I did not smell any smoke. Not to worry, though, because I soon learned the kitchen is equipped with several Alto-Shaam Smoker Ovens. These ovens are designed to slowly roast meats at precisely controlled low temperatures while permeating in the smoke of hickory wood chips. The smoke is contained and is exhausted out of the building. Bob’s smokers are capable of slow roasting 40 full racks of ribs at a time.

All of the BBQ is hickory-smoked with Bob’s Dry Rub. You can order it either “wet” meaning cooked with the sauce of your choice or “dry.” I recommend you order your meat choices “dry” so you can sample the tantalizing signature sauces on your table.



I also recommend you order a Sampler Platter: select any three meats from a choice of one third rack ribs (four bones), pulled pork, beef brisket, quarter chicken, smoked pork chop or smoked sausage.

The ribs are excellent. They are Saint Louis Style meaning they are spare ribs with the brisket bone and rib tips removed. The ribs are supplied by UW Provision Company in Middleton, WI. The Beef Brisket is so tender you can pull it apart with your fork. The Chicken is seasoned perfectly and the Pulled Pork is so tasty it doesn’t need any sauce. I think adding Bob’s sauces make it even more delicious!

My favorite meat is the Smoked Pork Sausage. This is processed by Straka meats in Plain, WI using Bob’s own recipe. It is smoky with a sweet flavor.



Bob’s Bitchin BBQ is not just BBQ. Everything is made from scratch and there are so many entrées you will be back to visit many times. Some examples are the Deep Fried Pickles made with tempura battered Arthur Schwartz’s Kosher Dill Pickles. Also, the Brisket Cheese Fries consisting of seasoned tempura batter waffle fries topped with beef brisket. The cheddar cheese curds from Arena Cheese in Arena, WI are also a treat.

The Reuben sandwich contains thick slices of slow roasted cured corned beef brisket topped with homemade sauerkraut and homemade 1000 Island Dressing on grilled marble rye.

Even the vegetarian Southwest Bean Burger is very popular (about 50 a week are served). It is made from scratch with a blend of black beans and pinto beans, pico de gallo, breadcrumbs and Southwest seasonings.

If all of these choices aren’t enough there are Nightly Specials. Some examples are: Tuesday BBQ Pork Quesadillas, Friday Night Fish Fry and Saturday Chicken & Ribs. Thursday is a particularly interesting night because they are Bob’s Choice and are not BBQ related like Shrimp Tacos or Italian Beef Hoagies.

And of course what goes better with BBQ then beer? There are 16 beers on tap. They are all craft beers from Wisconsin breweries. They include New Glarus, Potosi, Capital Brewery, Furthermore Beer, O’so, Tyranena and Milwaukee Brewing Company.



Don’t pass on the desserts! They are all baked on the premises and include Homemade Cookies, Donut Holes and the Dessert of the Day. When we visited this last one was a scrumptious Tres Leches (three milks) Cake.

Children really like this place and not just for cookies. They get to order Pulled Pork or Cheeseburger Sliders, Mac & Cheese, Chicken Strips or Wings or Root Beer Ribs. You might even notice some of these kids are frequent visitors. They are the ones wearing T-shirts that say “Bob’s Bad Word BBQ.”



BOB’S BITCHIN BBQ
167 N. Iowa Street, Dodgeville, WI 53533
608-930-2227 • BobsBitchinBBQ.com

Hours: Sun: 11 AM–8 PM; Mon: Closed; Tues–Wed: 11 AM–8 PM; Thu–Sat: 11 AM–9 PM
Dining Style: Come as you are
Noise Level: Conversational, loud with a full house
Recommendations: Fried Pickles, Brisket Cheese Fries, Sampler Platters, St. Louis Style Ribs, Pulled Pork, Beef Brisket, Smoked Sausage, Blackened Salmon, Hamburger, Southwest Bean Burger, Reuben, Jumbo Shrimp, All desserts
Liquor Service: Full Bar
Prices: \$6.95–\$20.95
Pay Options: Cash, Debit, Local Checks, All Credit Cards
Accessibility: Front door and restrooms
Kids Policy: Menu, Booster Seats, High Chairs
Reservations: No • **Catering:** No • **Take Out:** Yes
Delivery: No • **Parking:** On Street