



DARRELL’S— A FAMILY TRADITION

BY RICH BELMONT

I don’t know if Keith Marugg is a regular reader of my column. However he must have read my article where I stated I am a foodie and have been known to drive 50 miles for good food even if it is just a hot dog. So he contacted me and suggested I check out Darrell’s in Monticello, Iowa. And now I frequently find myself driving 35 miles to Darrell’s—A Family Tradition!



Darrell’s isn’t much to look at but who cares—all the food is outstanding. Eating there is like eating in your mom’s kitchen. And just like after eating at your mom’s you always leave very full and very satisfied.

The building Darrell’s is in was built in 1947 and it was originally the R & W Truck Stop with a café open 24 hours a day. Now that Highway 151 bypasses Monticello not much truck traffic passes in front of Darrell’s. But it’s still a truck stop because commercial drivers always know where to find good food.



Cory Reyner and his wife, Nicole, are the current owners of Darrell’s. Cory’s great grandparents, Kate and Herman Hoffman, opened the truck stop in 1947. They passed it on to Cory’s grandparents, Sam and Ruth Reyner. After many years they sold it to Cory’s

aunt, Danica Hughes, who called it Danica’s Fine Food. Seven year later she sold it to Cory’s mom and dad, Darrell and Lori Reyner. At first they renamed it Darrell’s Pizza and Steakhouse and then it just became known as Darrell’s—A Family Tradition.

A year ago Cory and Nicole took over as the fifth generation owners. No doubt they are hoping their son, Lincoln, will want to be the sixth generation to uphold the family tradition. Of course, it’s too early to tell if that will happen. After all, Lincoln is only 9 months old!

For now Nicole is the General Manager and Cory is Chief Cook. Cory has been in this restaurant his whole life. He was a server while in high school. After graduating he worked in a sawmill and a lumber company and became a driver of semi tractor-trailers and then a trainer of commercial drivers. All the while he continued to be a server and cook at Darrell’s on week-ends.

When you enter this restaurant the first thing you notice is the buffet bar. Darrell’s is famous in this area for the all-you-can-eat buffet. The buffet hours are:

- Lunch: Monday–Friday at 11 a.m.–2 p.m.
- Fish Fry: Friday at 5 p.m.–9 p.m.
- Breakfast: Sunday at 8 a.m.–1 p.m.

The lunch buffet always includes Broasted chicken, mashed potatoes & gravy, and pizza.



On one of my visits the buffet also contained lasagna, party potatoes, cabbage & ham and garlic toast. On another day the buffet included green bean casserole, boiled red potatoes, beef & noodles and green beans. Still another day there was pizza pasta, party potatoes, tater puff casserole and corn. The noodle casseroles are delicious. The noodles are made from scratch and the flavor combination are exceptional.

The soups are all home-made too. On any given day you might find one of the following: Potato, Bean & Ham, Vegetable Beef, Cheese Broccoli, Chicken Noodle, Creamy Asparagus or Chili. I have learned to sample the soup with every meal because they are that good.

The Friday Night Buffet is sensational. When I was there it had the following offerings: Tuna & Noodles, Baked Cod, Pizza, Broasted Chicken, Fried Pollack, Clam Strips, Mashed Potatoes, Fried Catfish, Hush Puppies and Fried Pangasius.

Oh, and in case you are wondering this last one is a species of very large shark catfish native to Asia and farm raised in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam. (Fun Fact: in order to try and



protect US catfish farmers the US Congress passed a law in 2003 preventing importers from labeling this fish a catfish. So in this country it is known as Pangasius and also, Panga, Basa or Bocourt).

And in case you forgot: Hush Puppies are simply another name for cornbread balls. For some reason they are always a great accompaniment at fish fries. (Another Fun Fact: hunters and fishermen would fry some basic cornmeal mixture and feed it to their dogs to keep them quiet or in other words “hush the puppies”).

Darrell’s is a very popular destination on Sunday mornings. The Buffet is always an assortment that might include homemade Cinnamon Rolls; Greek yogurt; Blueberry Muffins; Scrambled Eggs, both plain or with onions, peppers and mushrooms; Waffles; Fresh Fruit (in season); French Toast Sticks; Hash Browns either plain or with the aforementioned vegetables; Sausage; Bacon; Ham; Polish Sausage; Hash Rounds; Sausage Gravy & Biscuits; and Smoothies.

After you notice the buffet bar you might see the collectible plate collection. These are Norman Rockwell and Franklin Mint plates. The collection was started by Cory’s grandmother, Ruth, and there are about 94 of them on the wall.

If you drink coffee or tea take a close look at the cup it is served in. It is part of another collection. All of the cups are customer donations. They come from local businesses and from people returning from vacation. I have seen cups from San Francisco, Sump Coffee, Monticello’s 115th Annual Convention, a German shepherd and one that says “stolen from someplace in Lake of the Ozarks”.

One of the neat things about Darrell’s is everything on the menu is available any time day or night. So they have you covered if you want an omelet for dinner or you would like a Sirloin Steak dinner at 6 am.

I have been told many people go here for Skillet Breakfasts and Three Egg Omelets. These are not only expertly prepared, they are made with fresh ingredients. For example, I had a wonderful masterpiece called the Everything Omelet recently. It was a 3 egg ham and cheese omelet stuffed with fresh tomatoes, green peppers, mushrooms and onions. The only ingredient not fresh was the black olives. Cory buys fresh produce whenever possible from the Monticello Farmers Market which is located just across the street.



Another terrific omelet crowd pleaser is the Mexican. It contains taco meat, onions, peppers, American cheese, tomatoes, salsa and black olives and is covered with melted cheddar.



The Skillet Breakfasts are just as popular as the omelets. Cory’s favorite is the Steak Skillet. It is loaded with Philly steak, onions, peppers, mushrooms and cheese. Bryce Parks, publisher of *365ink*, really likes the Meat

Lovers Skillet with sausage, bacon, ham and cheese. But come to think of it Bryce really likes anything that has bacon in it.



The hamburgers are very good. The standard burgers are 5 ounces of ground beef formed by hand into patties and cooked on a flat top grill. Many regulars order the slightly larger 8 ounce Darrell burger with grilled onions and two slices of cheese.

Cory is modest and says he is all about just plain old home style cooking. However, I know better. I keep going back to Monticello because of the many house specialties. These include:



Hand Rolled Tenderloin – fresh pork loin is dipped in egg wash then pressed into cracker crumbs by hand with a rolling pin.



Broasted Chicken – it is hand dipped in a homemade batter then cooked in a Broaster high pressure fryer. This is exceptional chicken, it is not greasy and is so juicy and tender.



Hand Pattied Ground Beef – a splendid hand pattied hamburger steak is cooked to order. I order mine with grilled onions and sautéed mushrooms and I just love it.



Hot Beef – this is one of the most requested dinners. Bottom Round is slow roasted for 8 to 10 hours. Slices are placed between white bread. Then the sandwich is served with mashed potatoes and is smothered with homemade beef gravy.



The menu really does have too many good things making choosing one very difficult. But I have found the servers are always helpful and accommodating. Particularly my new

found friends, daytime waitresses, Candice and Teresa and nighttime waitress Maisy.

I have had to ask these lovely ladies for help just in choosing the kind of potato I should order. There are so many options:

- Baked Potato – served with butter or sour cream
- Broasted Potatoes – fried under high pressure
- Mashed Potatoes – with homemade gravy
- Criss Cuts – seasoned waffle fries
- Potato Puffs – otherwise known as Tater Tots
- American Fries – peeled, boiled and sliced fried potatoes
- Stealth Fries – straight cut French fries. These French fries are called Stealth because they are a brand name for the Lamb Weston Company. (Fun Story: the Lamb Weston Company did a promotion offering restaurants the opportunity to enter a drawing for a chance to win a 1995 Dodge Stealth sports car by placing an order for Stealth Fries. Cory’s dad was entered in the drawing and he won the car! (Not so Fun Fact: a few weeks later Cory’s brother, Casey, wrecked the car in an accident. A classic example of Easy Come-Easy Go).

After a satisfying meal you will definitely want to have dessert! Keep in mind all the cream pries are homemade. You might find they have pecan, coconut, Dutch apple, custard, strawberry, banana, peach, rhubarb, cherry or chocolate just to name a few possibilities.

So thank you Keith Marugg for putting me on to Darrell’s—A Family Tradition. It’s easy to get to. Just take Highway 151 to Exit 65. Go right onto Oak Street then right onto Main Street which is Highway 151 Business. It’s just a 35 minute and 35 mile ride from the Northwest Arterial and Dodge Street intersection in Dubuque.

Just ask anybody in Monticello and they will tell you: When you are in Darrell’s you are in “Tummy Heaven”.

DARRELL’S— A FAMILY TRADITION

225 S. MAIN STREET, MONTICELLO, IA 52310
319-465-3168
FACEBOOK.COM/DARRELLSAFAMILYTRADITION

Hours: Mon–Fri: 5 AM–9 PM; Sat–Sun: 5 AM–1 PM
Dining Style: Come as you are
Noise Level: Conversational
Recommendations: 3 Egg Omelets, Skillet Breakfasts, Darrell Omelet, Home Rolled Tenderloin, Darrell Burger, Home Made Soups, Broasted Chicken, Hot Beef Sandwich, Hand Pattied Ground Beef, Lunch Buffet, Friday Night Fish Fry Buffet, Sunday Morning Breakfast Buffet, Homemade Cream Pies
Liquor Service: None
Prices: Breakfast: \$1.25–\$13.95
Lunch: \$2.25–\$9.85; Dinner: \$5.50–\$12.50
Pay Options: Cash, Check, Debit, All Credit Cards
Accessibility: Front Door
Kids Policy: No Menu (coming soon), Highchairs, and Boosters
Reservations: Yes • **Catering:** Yes
Take Out: Drive -Up Window
Delivery: No • **Parking:** Large Private Lot