

THE FILAMENT MEETERY + EATERY

BY RICH BELMONT

The Diamond Jo Casino has been a land-based casino for nine years and once again it is bringing the people of Dubuque exciting and new experiences for us to enjoy.

I am referring to the opening of The Filament Meetery + Eatery on August 7, 2017. This new gathering place has the atmosphere of a modern pub with its large bar featuring a concrete bar top, a keg cooler behind the bar and an entryway lined with kegs. There is a social and comfortable ambience with a focus on delicious and unusual tasting food. This is not a typical sports bar like Mojo Sports Bar upstairs even though it is a great place to watch sports events since there are 15 large screen TVs.

Make no mistake about it, The Filament is all about the menu. The invention of the light bulb was a life-changing experience and some would say a real eye-opener. So are The Filament's menu selections with Brilliant Shareables, Radiant Greens & Soups, Incandescent Burgers and Sandwiches, Dazzling Large Plates and Luminous Desserts.

The food will sound familiar to you so you might be thinking it is typical pub food. However, you will soon know you are eating something new and exciting. Everything on the menu is made from scratch with fresh ingredients and the preparation is labor intensive. You might think you are ordering a typical burger, lettuce wrap, reuben, grilled cheese or sloppy joe but from your first bite you will understand the taste has been elevated to a whole new level of intense and unusual flavors.

This does not happen by accident. All of the primary personnel at The Filament are highly trained and consummate experienced professionals. They are:



Executive Chef Jonathan Nelson—he has been presiding over commercial kitchens for more than 30 years. He is a graduate of the Des Moines Area Community College Culinary Arts Program in Ankeny, Iowa. He began his career at J.J. Maguire's in

Burlington, IA. He was Executive Chef at Timmerman's Supper Club in East Dubuque and General Manager of Café Italia in Galena. Chef Nelson was invited to cook for Presidents Ronald Reagan and William Clinton. He has been named Chef Par Excellence three times at the Iowa Pork Producers Association Annual Pork Taste of Elegance Convention. He has been with the Diamond Jo since 2005 when it was still a casino boat.

Tom Spoor, Food & Beverage Director—He is the Diamond Jo Casino's F&B Director for 4 years. During the previous seventeen years he was Executive Chef at Horseshoe Casino in Hammond, IN and at International Service Partners in charge of First Class passenger cuisine for several airlines including Swissair, British Airways and KLM Royal Dutch Airlines.

Andrew Troy, House Chef—has been cooking professionally for sixteen years including stints at Village Inn, the now closed Back Street Steak and Chop House, Tony Roma's and Sous Chef at Copper Kettle in Dubuque.

Jessica Basalyga (bass-a-lay-ga), Front of the House Manager for both The Filament and Woodfire Grille. Jessica was on the opening team for both Tony Roma's and Champps Americana. Over eight years ago she started at the Diamond Jo Casino as a Hostess and then received promotions to Supervisor and Manager.

The Filament has 20 beers on tap and 12 of those are from local breweries. These include: Düber Dubuque Pilsner, Dubuque Beer Company; Slingshot Dunkel, Backpocket Brewing, Coralville, IA; Fevre River Ale Hefeweizen, Galena Brewing, Galena, IL; Good Old Potosi Golden Ale, Potosi Brewery, Potosi, WI; Spiced Up Apple Hard Cider, Wilson's Orchard, Solon, IA; McNutty's Belgian Kilo-Wit Belgian Witbier, Potosi Brewery, Potosi, WI.



ANDREW TROY, HOUSE CHEF; JESSICA BASALYGA, FRONT OF THE HOUSE MANAGER; AND TOM SPOOR, FOOD & BEVERAGE DIRECTOR



This last one is a seasonal selection labeled McNutty's in honor of soon to be famous Dubuquer Fritz McNutty. (Read Fritz's story at your table). The beer is a Belgian Style Witbier. It is pale and cloudy with a crispness and slight twang resulting from unfiltered wheat and high carbonation.

The house wine is Kenwood Vineyards from Sonoma County, Kenwood, CA. The Kenwood wines served here are not available in local retailers and are very reasonably priced.

So now I must explain what I mean when I say the food choices sound like familiar pub food items but taste like nothing you have ever had before. Here are a few examples:

Chips—they are house made sea salt and vinegar chips sliced from Kennebec potatoes. The Kennebec is widely used by restaurants for French fries and potato chips and is not usually found in grocery stores. It is a large potato with a thin tan skin and a slightly nutty taste.

Corn on the Cob—here it is Mexican Street Corn. Locally grown Finzel's sweet corn is slathered with Ancho (ahn-cho) Chili Crema (krai-mah) and Cotija (ko-tee-hah) cheese. The homemade ancho cream is made from dried Poblano Chilies. The cheese is a Mexican dry grating cheese produced from cow's milk and is similar to parmesan. It is named after the Mexican City Cotija in the state of Michoacán.

Chicken Lettuce Wraps—braised chicken, eggplant, water chestnuts, onion and a spicy Hoisin glaze. The kitchen makes the Hoisin from soy beans, fermented red chilies, a lot of garlic and citrus and a little vinegar.

Hot & Spicy Edamame (ed-duh-mah-may)—the soy beans are served in the pods in a sauce of garlic and crushed red chili peppers. You can eat the pods but most people squeeze the beans out of them.

Nacho Chips—Kennebec potato chips are covered in a pork chili Colorado, jack cheese, pico di gallo, guacamole and ghost chili crema. You have never had Nachos like this. The Chili Colorado is made from pork shoulder cooked confit overnight with citrus and chicken stock and dried Mexican Chiles. (Fun Fact: Colorado is the Spanish word for 'red colored' and does not mean the State of Colorado.) The Ghost Chili Cream really makes these Nacho Chips pop. It is made from both dried Ghost Peppers and dried Habanero (hab-a nero) peppers and lime juice. (Fun Fact: Ghost Peppers are very hot. They are rated at 1 million Scoville units compared to Tabasco Sauce which is only 2,500 to 5,000 units!)

Don't worry. The spicy dishes on Chef Nelson's menu are not all that hot. He brings his sauces and creams to the point of adding intense flavor but before there is too much heat. Many of Chef Nelson's meats are cooked confit style. Confit (kawn-fee) simply means a meat is cooked slowly in its own fat. The technique was originally developed in Gascony, France.



Hummus—no store bought hummus need apply here! Chickpeas are mashed into a homemade Hummus. It is served with toasted pita, fresh tomatoes, cucumbers, thick slices of Feta cheese and a delicious medley of Kalamata and Queen Green Olives.

Sliders—White Castle introduced sliders but these are Swiss Cheese and Mushroom Sliders! Three Iowa beef mini burgers are covered with Swiss cheese. What makes them so delicious is the addition of a mushroom duxelles (deu-SEHL). Chef Nelson's duxelles is prepared with roasted mushrooms, onions, shallots, garlic and blended cream cheese, Swiss cheese, bread crumbs, and eggs. (Fun Fact: The classic French Duxelles includes mushrooms sautéed in butter blended with cheese and cognac!)

Reuben—these are not Reuben sandwiches, no way! They are Reuben Egg Rolls! Corned beef, sauerkraut, Swiss cheese and Thousand Island dip are rolled into egg roll wrappers.

Grilled Cheese Sandwich—here they are Sliders and are nothing like ordinary grilled cheese. The melted cheese is a combination of Dante made from sheep's milk cheddar



supplied by Wisconsin Sheep Dairy Cooperative in Bruce, WI and Wisconsin Fontina (fon-tee-nah). (Fun Fact: Wisconsin cheesemakers now produce all three styles of Fontina: Italian, Swedish and Danish. The Filament uses the Italian style because it's creamier and has more elasticity like a mozzarella.

Hamburger—Nope, not here. This is a Banh Mi (bahn-mee) Burger. Banh Mi is a Vietnamese street food usually made with pork. In large US cities it is more commonly made with a beef patty. It is glazed with a caramel made from a combination of soy sauce, fish sauce, sugar and fermented chilies. It is topped with pickled Daikon radish and carrots, shaved cucumber, sliced jalapeños and citrus mayo.

Spaghetti & Meatball—this is no ordinary meatball and what a meatball it is! One pound of meat is formed from a combination of veal, pork sausage, and ground beef brisket. A scoop of Buffalo Mozzarella is stuffed into its center. The ball is covered with a thick coating of whipped ricotta cheese. Order it as an appetizer or as a dinner served over spaghetti. It's covered with a nice marinara sauce made from roasted tomatoes.



Bacon Cheese Burger—this is not what you think it is. It's called a BBQ Pork Belly Burger. A half-pound of chuck and brisket blend is topped with Pork Belly and Wisconsin Cheddar Cheese. Uncured pork belly is salt cured overnight and is cooked confit style and then caramelized on the flat top grill. It is covered with a tomato compote made with fire roasted tomatoes, garlic and onion.

Sloppy Joe—here it is called Sloppy Jo because the Diamond Jo uses homemade pot roast. Whole sides of brisket are rubbed with BBQ sauce, black pepper and salt, celery seed and braised overnight. The BBQ sauce is homemade from peppers, onions, tomatoes and brown sugar.

I must say I was very impressed with our server Kambrie Balser and her assistant Krista. I was dining on opening night and already Kambrie was able to explain the whole menu and even got the pronunciations right.

Please don't forget to leave room for those Luminous Desserts! They are all homemade. (Well, ok, the Potosi Root Beer and the ice cream in the Root Beer Float are not homemade). I especially enjoyed the Cookie Skillet. It's a chocolate chip cookie baked in a hot iron skillet and served with old-fashioned vanilla ice cream and hot fudge. The Funnel Cake Straws were also delicious and doubly so since they came with a delightful chocolate sauce. One of my servers, Alexis, was obviously pleased to be serving these scrumptious desserts!



The Filament is on the gaming floor so you must be at least 21 years old to enter.

The Filament Meetery + Eatery is the Diamond Jo's fifth restaurant. It's a new type of entertainment where there is: ALWAYS A BRIGHT IDEA!



THE FILAMENT

301 BELL ST, DUBUQUE, IA 52001
563-690-4755 • DIAMONDJO.COM

Hours: Mon–Thu: 4 PM–Midnight; Fri: 4 PM–2 AM
Sat 11 AM–2 AM; Sun: 11 AM–Midnight
Kitchen: Open until Midnight

Dining Style: Come as you are

Noise Level: Conversational

Recommendations: Hummus, Mexican Street Corn, Reuben Egg Rolls, Grilled Cheese Sliders, Spaghetti & Meatball, Banh Mi Burger, Sloppy Jo, Saucy Ribs, Mussels With Thai Red Curry, Cookie Skillet, State Fair Funnel Cake

Liquor Service: Premium Bar, 20 Craft Beers on Tap

Prices: Appetizers: \$5–\$12; Entrées: \$8–\$16

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

Accessibility: Front Door & Restrooms

Kids Policy: Must be Age 21 to Enter

Reservations: No • **Catering:** No

Take Out: Yes • **Delivery:** No

Parking: Complimentary Valet & Free Covered Parking