



Junction 21 Restaurant and Bar

by Rich Belmont

There is a big restaurant and bar completely surrounded by cornfields at the junction of Old Highway 20 and Y-21 (Sundown Road) in little Centralia, Iowa. Centralia is little because the town's population is only 133. Junction 21 Restaurant and Bar is big because on some nights it seems all 133 residents are in the place. It's as if every local citizen has emerged from those cornfields beckoned by Kevin Costner's call in Field of Dreams: "If you build it he will come".



Actually the building was already there in the 1940's. It was originally a grocery store and gas station. Then for many years it was the AMVETS Club owned by James Hill, a member of AMVETS (American Veterans) Post 13 in Peosta, Iowa. According to local historian, Jimmy Graff (right), a dance hall was added during the 1970's. The bar and main dining room are now in that dance hall.



In 2010 brothers Pat and Tim McAndrew purchased what was then called Gunther's Bar. They renamed it Junction 21, immediately upgraded the quality of the food, and began an ongoing renovation project. In the last three and half years they have raised the dance hall ceiling, graded and blacktopped part of the parking lot, made the restrooms accessible to persons with disabilities, added a new walk-in cooler and installed a new heating and air conditioning system.

Pat and Tim both had years of food service experience prior to opening Junction 21. Their grandmother was a member of the Kalmes family who owns Kalmes Restaurant in Saint Donatus, Iowa. So they learned the Luxembourg style of cooking when they were both quite young. Pat cooked at the Elk's Lodge in Dubuque and Tim managed Pizza Hut restaurants in Manchester and Dubuque.

Junction 21 is a family operation. Tim's sons Mitchell and Thomas are apprentice cooks. His wife Cindy and daughter Maria are part-time waitresses as are his nieces Kelly and Sammy. When you visit this restaurant you are immediately treated like family, too. On several visits I soon discovered most of the servers, like Shannon and Julie, always treat you like a regular and Jane Breitsprecker, a daytime server in particular, has an uncanny ability to remember names and favorite drinks. In fact, it's easy to settle in and make yourself at home. Sit at the bar and make new friends. Or relax and watch one of the eight televisions. A big screen projection TV is set up for major sporting events. Or perhaps you prefer to sit on the back deck and enjoy the country air and beautiful sunsets.

Junction 21 is well known for its assortment of craft beers. It has twelve of them on tap and they are changed each season. For example right now you can enjoy Samuel Adams Oktoberfest, Millstream Iowa Pale Ale, Goose Island 312, Shock Top Blackberry Wheat and Slingshot Backpocket. My favorite draw is not really a beer. It's called Angry Orchard Crisp Apple Cider and I can't explain it, it's sort of like drinking Halloween!

All the food is prepared fresh daily. Which is why it's always a good idea to start with some soup. You never know what kind of delicious concoction will be available. You might find Cheesy Potato and Bacon, Chicken Noodle, Cod Chowder, Chili, Reuben Sausage and Sauerkraut or Kohlrabi and Ham.



In case you are wondering about that last one Kohlrabi is a vegetable created by cross-breeding cabbages and turnips.

The burgers are always a good choice for lunch. They are a half pound of fresh, never frozen, ground chuck sprinkled with a special seasoning and broiled over an open flame. There are several specialty burgers like the Reuben with Canadian bacon, sauerkraut and thousand island dressing; the Hawaiian with Canadian bacon, pineapple ring and Swiss cheese; and my favorite the Green Olive and Swiss cheese. For



those who like a challenge like Bryce Parks, the senior member of my tasting team, there is the Junction 21 Burger! This is a full pound of hamburger with bacon, onion rings, cheddar cheese and BBQ sauce.

Junction 21 Restaurant and Bar

7653 Old Highway Road, Centralia, IA 52068

563-583-2100 facebook.com/Jct21oldhwyrd

HOURS: 11 am - Close Food served open to close

DINING STYLE: Come as you are

NOISE LEVEL: Loud at times

RECOMMENDATIONS: Burgers, Teriyaki Chicken Wrap, Friday Fish Fry, Taco Bar, Taco Salad, Sirloin Steak, Homemade, Soups, Pizza, Broasted Chicken, Jumbo Shrimp, Thursday Chef's Choice Buffet, Saturday BBQ Ribs

LIQUOR SERVICE: Full Bar

PRICE RANGE: Lunch: \$4 - \$10.50, Dinner: \$4 - \$19.50

PAYMENT OPTIONS: Cash, Debit, Checks, All Credit Cards, ATM on premises

ACCESSIBILITY: Front Door & Restrooms

KIDS POLICY: Menu, Booster, Highchairs

CATERING: Yes **TAKE OUT:** Yes **DELIVERY:** No

RESERVATIONS: Yes **PARKING:** Large Private Lot

The lunch menu includes a whole list of satisfying meals. The Teriyaki Grilled Chicken is wrapped in a tortilla with fresh lettuce, tomatoes and cheese. The Pork Tenderloin is a real piece of tenderloin, not that processed stuff, and you can order it either grilled or fried. The French Dip is a roll piled high with roast beef and served with a side of savory au jus for dipping. By the way, I get a kick out of the fact that the French Dip is made from really good Italian beef!



After several visits I noticed there is a steady lunch crowd at Junction 21. Most of these regulars are there for the All You Can Eat Lunch Buffet. Tuesday is Mexican Day with nachos and nacho cheese and an impressive taco bar (above). It contains hard corn shells, homemade flour tortillas, ground beef, seasoned pulled chicken and the usual toppings of onions, tomatoes, lettuce, sour cream and cheddar cheese. There is a whole lot more, though, including pico de gallo, guacamole, black olives, jalapeños and hot and mild salsa. Wednesday's buffet is salad bar, soup, broasted chicken and pizza and Friday's is the same except there is cod and fried shrimp instead of chicken. Thursday's buffet is always a pleasant surprise. It is Chef's

Choice which means you might find prime rib or spaghetti, pork loin, meat loaf or anything else the chefs decide they themselves want to eat. Incidentally, buffets always include a potato and a vegetable. That's because Tim's and Pat's mother taught them to eat healthy!

Junction 21 has a reputation for excellent Broasted Chicken, Pizza, All You Can Eat Cod Fish Fries on Fridays and All You Can Eat BBQ Spare Ribs on Saturdays.



The Broasted Chicken parts are placed in special brine before frying. This imparts a delectable flavor to the chicken. And not only that there is a special price on 10 piece dinners, including French fries and coleslaw on Wednesday and Sunday nights that makes them taste even better! It's also good to know the Shrimp, Codfish and Catfish are never cooked in the same Broaster with the chicken.



Pizzas are extremely popular here. The ingredients are all fresh and the crust is made from dough prepared from Tim's personal recipe. You can build your own from a list of 12 toppings or just order The Works that has them all except the jalapeño peppers. There are several specialty pizzas to choose from including Beef or Chicken Taco, BLT, Bacon Cheeseburger or Canadian Bacon & Sauerkraut. My tasting crew couldn't make up their minds so we had half Chicken Taco and half All Meat. It was sort of a taste of two different cultures on one pizza.



Meat lovers are happy here too. There are tasty Ribeye and savory Sirloin Steaks flame broiled to your liking. For you seafood connoisseurs there are several choices such as grilled or fried Jumbo Shrimp, baked or fried Cod or fried Catfish.



What with the Tuesday all you can eat Taco Buffet, the Wednesday and Sunday special priced 10 piece Broasted Chicken dinners, all you can eat Cod Fish Fry on Friday s and BBQ Ribs on Saturday it's tough to save room for dessert. But you must! Your server can tell you what's available such as cheesecake or a pie like Chocolate Silk, Pumpkin or Lemon. I prefer an Ice Cream Sundae with chocolate, caramel and nuts. You might opt for a Root Beer Float or a creamy Pink Squirrel or Grasshopper.



You always have a good time at Junction 21. Like their slogan says it's the place "Where Family and Friends Gather".