



# KALMES BREAKTIME GRILL & SPIRITS

REVISITED  
BY RICH BELMONT

There have been many changes at this neat little bar and restaurant at the corner of Jackson and 11<sup>th</sup> Street in Dubuque since I wrote about it in July, 2010.

To be sure, the building, which dates back to 1903, is still the same. It's a brick building in Dubuque's Historic Millwork District and it still has a slanted floor pitched towards the Mississippi River. This was done on purpose to insure water would drain out when the river overflowed its banks. This is also the reason why the back of the dining room and kitchen are three steps higher than the bar area.



The building has always housed a bar and had several names through the years including Burt's Tavern, Murphy's Tap, Blue Moon Inn and the Kennel Club. It became Kalmes Breaktime Grill & Spirits when Mike and Theresa Kalmes took it

over in 1996. They sold it to their sons Dallas and TJ in 2005. And two years ago Dallas sold his interest to TJ so he could pursue a different career. So the first big change is TJ is now the sole owner. He is a Fifth Generation Kalmes in the bar and restaurant business. The lineage started when his Great Grandpa Peter Kalmes opened a bar in the early 1890's in the Luxemburg Village of Saint Donatus, Iowa. TJ started working in his family's restaurant when he was 8 years old. He began as a dishwasher and busboy and was cooking by the time he was 13. He has now been in the kitchen over 25 years!

You might notice some of the improvements TJ has implemented over the last couple of years. For example the operating hours have been changed so Kalmes is open 7 days a week and lunch is available all day from 11 am to close.



The bar has been remodeled and many of the tabletops have been resurfaced using scrap wood removed from the CARADCO Building and from repurposed fence posts.



The Beer Tap System has been replaced with one containing more taps. The beers on tap are frequently changed. During my last visit the twelve taps had these brews:

- Exile Brewery Bad Bishop Belgian Tripel
- Bud Light Pale Lager
- Stone Cliff Hard Stone Cider
- Blue Moon Belgian White Ale
- Backpocket Brewery Slingshot Dunkel
- Apricadaba Apricot Wheat Ale
- Oskar Blues Dale's Pale Ale
- Great River Brewery 483 Pale Ale
- Potosi's Shot Tower Espresso Stout
- Galena Brewery Anna Belle's IPA
- Samuel Adams Cold Snap
- Exile Punk Monk Belgian Dubbel

The Kalmes bar also specializes in craft beer in bottles. I counted 20 listed on the blackboard including:

- Bells Smitten Golden Rye Ale
- Bells Two Hearted Ale IPA
- Bent River Uncommon Stout
- Bent River Jalapeño Pepper Ale
- Left Hand Brewing Milk Stout Nitro
- Squatters Hop Rising Double IPA
- Major Tom's Pomegranate Wheat



Some of these beers are stored in an old converted Coca Cola cooler. This is one of the first soda bottle vending machines that holds the bottles by the necks in racks. TJ modified it to hold beer bottles.

The new menu still has many items regular customers crave. There are also some additions sure to please. You choose from a list of ten appetizers including Buffalo Wings, Onion Straws, Breaded Dill Spears and Cheese Curds. I like to order snacks to share so I get the Breaktime Combo with some of each of the appetizers or the Fried Cheese Platter containing white cheddar curds, bacon cheddar curds, jalapeño curds and tomato-basil encrusted mozzarella chunks.



The soups are all delicious. Each day a different one is featured and so it might be Cheeseburger Soup, Stuffed Green Pepper, Chicken Cordon Bleu or Cheesy Chicken Tortilla just to name a few.

Of course, burgers are a specialty of the house. They are hand-formed patties made from freshly ground ribeye steak trimmings. TJ gets his ground beef from Kalmes Restaurant in Saint Donatus. He needs 250 pounds each week!



You can customize your burger by choosing from an assortment of toppings. However, I recommend you try one of the 16 specialty burgers like the Zesty with a spicy sauce, onion straws and American cheese; or a

Western with bacon, BBQ sauce, onion straws and American cheese; or a Green Olive with guess what? Green olives and Swiss cheese. The burgers are close to half pounders and if you are really hungry you can order an approximate one pound burger for only \$3.00 more.

When you are in the mood to try something really different ask your server what the Burger of the Month is. Each month TJ gets really creative and comes up with a highly unusual combination of flavors in a hamburger. This really special burger is available all day and for only one month or until TJ runs out of the ingredients. Last month the Burger of the Month was the Bloody Mary Burger: cheddar, green olives, bacon, Bloody Mary sauce, breaded dill spear, minced celery, and horseradish sauce topped with fresh dill on a beer bun. Next month will be a real treat called the Dub Mango Unchained Burger. It's topped with pulled pork, slaw, mango and tropical habanero sauce.



Now despite what you might be thinking Kalmes Breaktime is not just about burgers. Oh no, there are many other excellent choices. For example, the BLT contains Applewood center-cut wood smoked

bacon; the Homemade Chicken Strips are hand breaded and fried; and the Ribeye Steak Sandwich is trimmed of all excess fat and seasoned with Kalmes Seasonings. You can order your breaded Pork Tenderloin either grilled or fried.



Seafood choices include: Hand Breaded Fried Jumbo Shrimp; Grilled Jumbo Shrimp seasoned with Caribbean jerk seasoning; Fried Cod Loins; and Broiled Cod with either Kalmes Seasoning or Caribbean jerk seasoning.

And I haven't even mentioned any of the 10 chicken sandwiches yet. The Chicken Swiss and Mushroom is really good and so is the Chicken Western Sandwich topped with American cheese, bacon, BBQ sauce and onion straws. I enjoy the Jerk Chicken Sandwich made with TJ's own Jerk sauce: he makes it from apricot and orange marmalade, jerk seasoning, soy sauce, minced pineapple and jalapeño, brown sugar, honey and dark rum. My favorite chicken sandwich is simply called Buffalo Chicken, the filet is topped with a spicy buffalo sauce and is served with ranch dressing or bleu cheese.

All sandwiches and burgers are served with a side of coleslaw and crinkle cut fries. For only a dollar more you can have sweet potato wedges or crispy coated fries. Many of the regulars ask for off-menu House-cut fries: every Tuesday the kitchen slices 150 pounds of potatoes and serves them upon request until gone.



Daily Specials are listed on the blackboard and they are really good deals. For example on Mondays all burgers are \$6.95. But on Tuesday all burgers are only \$2.50 and fries are \$1.50. Plus domestic beer bottles are only \$2.00 and all rail drinks are only 2 dollars.



There are four Friday Specials to choose from: Ribeye Steak Sandwich; Chicken Strips; Cod Fish or Shrimp Basket.

When you are checking out the bar you might observe a small sign that states the rules of this establishment are all made by Drew. Then when you are reading the menu you can't help but notice there is a most interesting burger called the El Drew. It includes mini tacos, lettuce, salsa, sour cream, jalapeños and cheddar. You will also see a fascinating El Drew Pollo Chicken Sandwich topped with those same ingredients. Well just so you know El Drew is the almost famous Drew Arensdorf who is TJ's counselor, trusted adviser and maybe his friend.

Appetizers and sandwiches are served all day and dinners start at 4 pm. The beef entrées have all been selected for their excellent flavor. The Bistro Filet is a shoulder tenderloin that is butterflied and has very fine marbling making it lean but packed with beefy flavor. The Ribeye is juicy and sweet and the Hamburger Steak is delicious ground beef topped with sautéed onions. The BBQ Ribs are very good. These tender back pork loin ribs are hand patted with a dry rub, then slow roasted for 20 to 24 hours. They are basted with a BBQ sauce before being served. I like the pork flavor so much I prefer to order mine without the sauce.

The Fried Chicken is exceptional. That's because the chicken is lightly breaded with Kalmes signature breading from the Kalmes Saint Donatus restaurant. Then the chicken is fried in pressurized fryers. An all-white meat option is not specified on the menu but it is available.



I highly recommend you visit on Friday or Saturday night when the Nightly Special is Prime Rib. This exquisite cut of beef is covered with a crust of several different salts and is slow roasted for 4 hours.

The Sunday special is the Bloody Mary Bar. TJ had a special bar custom built where he sets up all the ingredients for you to make your own Bloody Mary. There are several mixes and many add-ins including pickles, celery, peppers, olives, sausage, scallions and cheese cubes.

So many of Kalmes Breaktime Grill & Spirits signature dishes are so good because Kalmes Seasoning and Horseradish are used in their preparation. Kalmes Seasoning and Kalmes Horseradish are available for purchase so you can take them home to use on your own specialties.



And don't forget a good dinner requires a scrumptious dessert! On most nights fabulous pies are available. Your server will tell you the nightly selections. There are many

possibilities including cherry, turtle, pecan, banana, key lime, lemon, or snickers. They are expertly baked by Lisa Brinnen of the Bellevue Pie House in Bellevue, Iowa.

## KALMES BREAKTIME GRILL & SPIRITS

1097 JACKSON STREET, DUBUQUE, IA 52001  
563-582-8566 • KALMESDUBUQUE.COM  
FACEBOOK.COM/KALMESBREAKTIME

**Hours:** Bar: Mon: 11 AM-7 PM; Tues-Sat: 11 AM-Close; Sun: 10 AM-4 PM; Kitchen: Mon: 11 AM-7 PM; Tue-Thu: 11 AM-9 PM; Fri-Sat: 11 AM-10 PM; Sun: 10 AM-3 PM  
**Dining Style:** Sports Bar Casual

**Noise Level:** Conversational

**Recommendations:** Fried Cheese Platter, Green Olive Burger, Buffalo Chicken Sandwich, Ribeye Steak Sandwich, Pork Tenderloin, Chicken Strips, Burger of the Month, Prime Rib, Fried Chicken, BBQ Ribs, Western Burger, Bistro Filet, Jerk Chicken Sandwich, Bellevue Pie House Pies

**Liquor Service:** Full Bar

**Prices:** Lunch: \$6.25-\$13.95; Dinner: \$9.95-\$22.95

**Pay Options:** Cash, Check, Debit, Discover, MasterCard, Visa, ATM on Premises

**Accessibility:** Ramp to Side Door and Restrooms

**Kids Policy:** Menu, Highchairs, Boosters

**Reservations:** Yes • **Catering:** Yes

**Take Out:** Yes • **Delivery:** Yes

**Parking:** On Street and Off Street behind building