

DENNY'S LUX CLUB

BY RICH BELMONT

I have driven by Denny's Lux Club hundreds of times over the years. I never went in the place but I must admit I was always curious why there were so many cars parked all around it.

So I finally stopped for lunch and now I know why everybody I know goes to Denny's: friendly people, good food and really low prices!

Both the club and the building it's in have interesting histories.

The Lux Club was originally located at the corner of Central Avenue and 18th Street in Dubuque. It was owned by Frank Reuter who operated it as "Key" Club. Back in the day Key Clubs were only open to members who paid dues to drink alcoholic beverages in them. Mr. Reuter named his club after the Luxembourger Club of Chicago where he was a member and paid a \$200 annual fee.



The Lux Club moved to its present location on Asbury Road in 1955 where at that time it was just outside the Dubuque City limits.

The building the Lux Club moved into had been a small general store back in the early 1900's. It gradually evolved into a bar and there is evidence it was a speakeasy selling bootleg whiskey during the Prohibition Era. Some of that evidence can still be seen today: the two-way mirror so the bartender could see who was coming through the front door and the discreetly placed alarm bells to warn if those people were Prohibition Agents.

Bev and Denny Larsen lived in Aurora, IL where Denny was the manager of The Great Atlantic & Pacific Tea Company grocery store. They moved to Dubuque when Denny was asked to run the A & P store in the building that is now the Blind Society on Asbury Road.



In 1975 Denny resigned from A & P and he and Bev were soon owning and operating several bar/restaurants in Dubuque. They included the Finale Lounge, The Idle Hour,

The Corner Tap, The Tube Food Shop and Denny's Lux Club in Manchester, IA. In 1978 they purchased the Lux Club on Asbury Road and changed the name to Denny's Lux Club.

Bev and Denny operated the Lux Club for over 30 years. In 2001 they turned it over to their daughter Kelly Oppelt (O-pelt). Kelly literally grew up in the bar business and even though she holds a Bachelor of Computer Information Systems degree from Clarke University she just couldn't stay away from the Lux Club. And to her credit she continues to operate it just like he parents did.



It's the kind of place where everybody knows your name. The place where the patrons all talk to each other and the staff is one big happy family. Kelly says the bar's success can be

attributed to her mom and dad who taught her well. She goes on to explain Denny's Lux Club continues to do well because of her talented and dedicated employees. People like Stacey Trentz, (call her Stace), the bartender, who is in full control of the front of the house and has been there over 25 years; Tracy Dillon, an outstanding cook and Doug Hull, the handyman, sometime food runner and busser.

Denny's Lux Club is a great place to meet your friends. It has 9 beers on tap and free Wi-Fi (the password is DennyLuxClub). You can reserve the back room complete with its own bar and there is no charge. You can bring your own food (but not beverages) or you can have the kitchen cater your event.

There is an extensive collection of beer tappers to check out and the back room walls are lined with celebrity photos of



famous people including W.C. Fields, Marilyn Monroe, John Wayne and Lucille Ball.

Food is only served at lunch time. The kitchen is only open from 11 am to 2 pm Monday through Saturday. And during those three hours I have observed a steady rush of regular customers many of whom stop in every day for lunch.



For snacks there is a rather lengthy list of appetizers including Onion Rings, Cheese Curds, Chicken Nuggets, Chicken Wings, Buffalo Bites, Taco Bites and Mac n Cheese Bites. I prefer the Garbage Basket which is a chef's choice assortment of several of these items.



There are also several ways to satisfy your potato cravings: Straight Fries, Seasoned Fries, Cheesy Fries and Chili Cheese fries. Then there are the Lux Club Homemade Chips. These are thin potato slices deep fried and seasoned with Denny's Lux Club All Purpose Seasoning. This is a wonderful blend of herbs and spices and it can be purchased for you to use at home. I have already liberally



sprinkled it on baked potatoes, steaks and vegetables. It's a really good seasoned salt with a combination of spices that doesn't overpower the flavors of the foods you put it on!



Denny was famous for his soups. They are all simply delicious because they are made with fresh ingredients and are thick and chunky. Monday is Chicken Noodle and Tuesday is Cream of Potato with Bacon soup day. Other soups you might find on Wednesday through Saturday are Bean with Ham, Beer Cheese with Bacon, Cream of Chicken, Seafood Chowder or Italian Wedding. I recommend you order a bowl because these soups are too good to just have a cup. When you order a cup you are just teasing your taste buds!

I just had the Italian Wedding Soup yesterday and I can tell you since I am Italian I have attended many Italian weddings. I have never had a better wedding soup. Incidentally, the name "Italian Wedding Soup" is a bad translation of "Minestra Maritata" which literally means "married soup." It refers to the marriage of flavors of greens usually endive, escarole, cabbage kale or spinach and meats which in this country are almost always sausage, meatballs or both in a chicken-based broth.

Bev says she wanted Denny to retire but he said he wouldn't leave until his daughter, Kelly, could do all the soups the right way. He stayed on for two more years until she got them right! Only then did he retire and devote himself to Camp Albrecht Acres where he was Jack of all Trades and Master of the Kitchen. He remained active at the camp until his passing on June 30, 2011.



His Hot Dogs are really good, too. So is the Chili which is served every day. I must say the Chili is the best I have tasted in a long time. It is slightly sweet and full of savory ground beef. In fact the Chili is so good I can't wait to go back for a Foot Long Dog with Chili. I will be sure to order the Yunt Special. Oh, and before you

ask: several of the menu items are named in honor of regular customers who routinely order their preferred lunch. The Yunt Special is a foot long dog with chili, cheese, tomato and onion and is the favorite of Tom Yunt who was President and CEO of Woodward Communications for 10 years.

I must say I also like the Double Burger. It's two quarter-pound patties with Swiss and American cheese. I ask them to

hold the American cheese and put olives on it instead. The burgers are really good because the fresh ground beef is supplied by Jerry (Bear) Link, Owner of Bear's Burgers and Buns (563-495-3200).



over rice. It's really good, and besides, Bear says you can't eat burgers every day, can you?

If you like salads there are 6 to choose from including Chef, Taco, Grilled Chicken and Buffalo Chicken. On my next visit I am going to have the Pottsy Salad. It's Buffalo Chicken with jalapeños, bacon and egg and is the favorite of TJ Potts, Principal of Kennedy School.

I find it amusing that even though Bear supplies the beef his favorite menu item is the Bear Special. It's grilled chicken breast, onions, mushrooms and Caribbean Jerk seasoning



Beef Roasts, Pork Loins and Briskets are all slow roasted in-house and hand sliced. So suffice it to say the roast beef, homemade BBQ pork and Reuben are all terrific lunches.



And remember the steady stream of regular customers I mentioned? They are there for the great Monday through Friday Daily Specials. Tuesday is always Soft Shell Taco day; Thursday is always Open Faced Roast Beef and Mashed Potato Day; Friday is the day for Ribeye Steak Sandwiches. Monday and Wednesday are off-menu days and are always a sumptuous surprise: maybe a Chicken Patty Melt, a Ham and Cheese on Croissant, or a Meatball, Turkey and Dressing or Chicken Cordon Bleu Sandwich.

Well, I still pass by Denny's Lux Club at least twice a day. Only now and then I stop in for lunch along with the rest of the regulars. After, all, the food is excellent and I get a lot of it for just a little money!



DENNY'S LUX CLUB

3050 Asbury Road, Dubuque, IA 52001

563-557-0880 • Facebook.com/DennysLuxClub

Hours: Bar: Mon-Sat: 9 AM-2 AM; Sun: 12 PM-2 AM

Lunch: Mon-Sat: 11 PM-2 PM

Dining Style: Come as you are

Noise Level: Conversational

Recommendations: Soup of the Day, Daily Specials, Chili, Buffalo Bites, Seasoned Fries, Double Burger, Carmichael, Bear Special, BBQ Pork, Tuna and Egg Salad, Pottsy Buffalo Chicken Salad, Foot Long Chili Dog

Liquor Service: Full Bar

Prices: \$2.75-\$7.50

Pay Options: Cash, Debit, MasterCard, Visa, Discover; ATM on premise

Accessibility: Ramp to Front Door and Restroom

Kids Policy: Menu-No, High Chair-Yes, Booster-Yes

Reservations: No • **Catering:** Yes

Take Out: Yes • **Delivery:** No

Parking: Adjacent Private Lot & On Street