



TASTE! COUNTRY ROADHOUSE

BY RICH BELMONT

Taste! Country Roadhouse is just a ten minute drive east on US Highway 20 from the Julien Dubuque Bridge. It's kind of in the middle of nowhere, but it has quickly become the go-to place for craft beers, fish fries, great burgers, Broaster chicken and exceptionally flavorful pizzas.

Frank and Debbie Venturella opened Taste! on September 13, 2013. They quickly gained a reputation for serving fantastic food in a laid-back, comfortable environment. That should come as no surprise. This was not their first venture in the bar business.

Frank literally grew up in his cousin's grocery store. When he finished school he became a police officer in a Chicago suburb. After a few years he went back to his first passion—food! He operated a sports bar and banquet hall in Norridge, IL called Flat Tops for several years before moving to the Galena, IL area.



At first Frank and Debbie purchased a house near Galena as a week-end get away. When they discovered the bar and banquet hall on Highway 20 was available they purchased it and not long after they opened Taste! Six months later they brought in their son-in-law, Jason Gonzalez, to be their chief cook.

The bar and restaurant's name includes an exclamation point for a good reason. Only high quality ingredients are used so you are invited to take the time to Taste! The meats, cheeses and vegetables are from local purveyors as much as possible. Some examples include ground beef from Pat's Country House Grocery, Scales Mound, IL; chicken from Gold 'N' Plump Poultry, Arcadia, WI; cheese curds from Riverside Foods, Two Rivers, WI and beer battered cod, onions and mushrooms from Brakebush in Westfield, WI.

Taste! features craft beers. There are eleven of them on tap. In case you are not sure what a craft beer is permit me to explain. According to the Brewers Association in Boulder, CO an American craft brewer is small, independent and traditional:

Small—the brewery produces no more than 6 million barrels of beer a year.

Independent—less than 25 percent of the craft brewery is owned by a brewer that is not itself a craft brewer.

Traditional—the majority of the brewery's total alcohol volume is in beers whose flavors are derived from traditional or innovative brewery ingredients and their fermentation.

If you really want to know if you're drinking a true craft beer there is an app for that. Craft Check allows you to scan the barcode on the bottle. The app is available for iPhone now and will be available for Android phones in a few more weeks. Learn more at CraftCheckApp.com.



By the way, a craft beer is not the same as a microbrew. A microbrewery produces less than 15,000 beer barrels a year and at least 75 percent of that beer must be sold outside the brewery. Also there are no strict guidelines for the techniques or ingredients a micro-brewery uses so pretty much anything is possible.

Currently the craft beers on tap at Taste! are:

Backpocket Slingshot Dunkel (Dunkel is German for dark); Great River Hopapotamus; Horney Goat Chocolate Peanut Butter Porter (Porter means dark style); Horney Goat Hopped Up N Horny; Left Hand Milk Stout Nitro (Stout also means dark beer, are you seeing a pattern here?); Pig Minds Southy Bitch Slap; Potosi Belgian Tripel (Tripel is a term meaning a strong ale); Potosi Fish Fly Golden Rye; Potosi Holiday Bock; Potosi Slugger (aged in Templeton Rye Barrels) and Potosi Tangerine IPA (India Pale Ale).



Since eating at this restaurant is all about tasting I recommend you start out with a craft beer and an appetizer. The Brew House Combo is a great sampling of onion rings, mozzarella sticks, gulf shrimp, mushrooms, chicken strips and jalapeño snappers.

The white cheddar cheese curds are so fresh and lightly breaded Frank claims they almost squeak when you bite into them. The French fries and potato chips are hand cut from fresh potatoes every day.

Sandwiches are first rate. For instance Bam Bam Buffalo is a marinated chicken breast topped with blue cheese and buffalo sauce. The Turkey Wrap is stuffed with slices of deboned turkey breast that is slow roasted in the kitchen.



Hamburgers are outstanding. They certainly rank in my top five burgers in the Dubuque area. Frank has developed his own proprietary blend of ground beef prepared for him at Pat's Country House Grocery. The one-third pound Angus beef loosely packed patties are generously sprinkled with a secret house seasoning blend.



All the chicken is supplied by Gold 'N' Plump and it is fresh, never frozen. It is bathed in a salt brine marinade and hand battered. Then it is either grilled or fried in Broaster high pressure fryers. The Broaster chicken is a favorite for take-out and the wings are splendid. They are particularly delicious on Sunday Funday when the wings are only 25 cents each!



When I visit Taste! I am always tempted to order Broaster Chicken or Pizza. So I have to remind myself not to pass up the daily specials. For example I recently had a fantastic Italian Beef sandwich. The beef was slow roasted in an Alto-Shaam Cook & Hold oven for 16 hours, and then marinated in tasty Italian gravy. Another special was the Cheesy Pig: pulled pork in a grilled cheese and bacon on sourdough bread sandwich. If it's my lucky day the special will be Pork Loin: it's marinated, tenderized, hand battered and broasted.



Now the pizza! I expected it to be really good and this pizza exceeded my expectations. Well, of course it would, Frank is my Goombah. Both of us have grandparents who came to this country from Sicily. So it is fair to say this pizza is Siciliano. It is made in house with a tomato sauce that



contains special Italian seasonings. It is baked the way pizzas are supposed to be with the toppings under the cheese. And the cheese is whole milk mozzarella!

I have to laugh now. When I moved to Dubuque 30 years ago I asked if I could get pizza with whole milk mozzarella instead of part skim. I was laughed at and told there was no such thing!

I particularly like the sausage pizza. That's because this pie is covered with delicious sweet and mild sausage chunks (not thin slices) made by Fontanini in Chicago. Actually the company was started in Chicago in 1960 by Oriano Fontanini and was originally called Capitol Wholesale Meats. Fontanini is now located in a new state-of-the-art manufacturing plant in McCook, IL and is a prominent manufacturer of Italian meats and other products. Their sausage is made from select, lean cuts of pork, Italian seasonings, fennel and garlic.

By the way, Taste! has a gluten-free crust pizza available too.

While I am thinking of inimitable manufacturers Taste! is proud to serve Eli's Cheesecake also from Chicago. Eli Schulman started his first restaurant in 1940 called Eli's Ogdan Huddle later followed by Eli's Stage Delicatessen. During the Great Depression Eli hung a sign in his restaurant's window "if you are hungry and have no money we will feed you for free". In 1966 he opened Eli's Place For Steak where he decided to make cheesecake his signature dessert. He created a cheesecake so rich and creamy his customers proclaimed it Chicago's finest.



Eli's has grown from a local favorite to one of the country's largest specialty bakeries producing 20,000 cheesecakes and desserts daily. Eli's Cheesecakes are so luscious because they are a baked cheesecake made from slow cultured cream cheese, sugar, eggs, sour cream and pure vanilla on a butter cookie crust. Eli's Cheesecakes are currently made in over 40 flavors. At Taste! you will find at least one and maybe two. On my last visit I thoroughly enjoyed Salted Caramel. I suggest you take some home with you. Eli's Cheesecakes keep in the fridge for up to 7 days and in the freezer for up to 6 months.

Taste! is also a huge Banquet Hall or Event Center. Standing in front of the building you would never guess the hall has a seating capacity of up to 500. At this time the kitchen can cater up to 350 people.

The next time you are in the mood to really taste your dinner may I suggest you visit Taste! Country Roadhouse? If I may borrow the slogan from the House of Fontanini you will experience a beautiful difference: Una Bella Differenza!

TASTE! COUNTRY ROADHOUSE

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815-747-6656 • TasteCountryRoadhouse.com
Facebook.com/TasteCountryMarketplace

Hours: Wed-Fri: 2 PM-Midnight;
 Sat-Sun: 11 AM-9 PM; Mon-Tue: Closed

Dining Style: Come as you are

Noise Level: Conversational

Recommendations: Craft Beer, Brew House Combo, Cheese Curds, Bam Bam Buffalo, Beer Battered Cod, Burgers, Chicken Wings, Broaster Chicken, Pizzas, Eli's Cheesecake

Liquor Service: Full Bar

Prices: \$7.95-\$19.95

Pay Options: Cash, Debit, Local Checks, All Credit Cards except AMEX

Accessibility: Front door—(ramp onto front porch) and restrooms

Kids Policy: Welcome—Menu; High Chairs: Yes; Booster Seats: No

Reservations: Yes • **Catering:** Yes • **Take Out:** Yes

Delivery: No • **Parking:** Large Private Lot