

# HAPPI HIBACHI

BY BRYCE PARKS

If Dubuque has a most recognizable celebrity chef, Reza Bheldy might be it. You likely don't know the name, but you've probably seen his face if you've ever been to a hibachi restaurant in Dubuque. That's because almost as long as that style of



cooking has been popular in the area, Reza has been a featured hibachi chef at the restaurants that serve it. After a few years honing his skills at Benihana in Minneapolis, MN, Reza came to Dubuque to work at Taiko Japanese Steakhouse & Sushi Bar in Key West, IA for five years followed by another five years at Ichiban Steakhouse and Sushi Bar on University Ave.

So as you can imagine, at this point Reza can probably do hibachi in his sleep—and he probably does. Putting his skills to work behind his very own restaurant has been a dream of Reza's for a few years now, and it was about five years ago that he started working toward that goal. In 2017, with the enthusiastic support of his partner both in life and this new career endeavor, Lindsey Wallace, and Lindsey's parents, Dan and Barb Wallace, who put their faith and support behind them couple undertaking this dream, they took the next step towards their goal.

And even as they just begin this journey, Reza admits that his end goal one day would be to have his own permanent restaurant. With that in mind, I mentioned how another local food truck, Beauty and the Beef, had worked their success into a permanent restaurant called American Bombshell, located in the Roshek Building Lobby. Reza and Lindsey then told us that the very cool ladies at American Bombshell actually served as mentors for them as they embarked on their food truck dreams. Lindsey met with them very early in the process where they gave her tips and tricks involved in successfully running this kind of business, giving them lots of credit for a smooth start, stating emphatically that "They were awesome!" As of Memorial Day 2018, this has been Reza's full time gig, with Lindsey and a support crew helping as needed.

So the couple found a used food truck in Davenport and remodeled it, though it did not need a lot of work as it was basically ready to roll as it was. It just needed a fresh, fun paint job to tell the world that Happi Hibachi

has arrived in Dubuque. In fact, it is, to their knowledge, the only hibachi food truck in Iowa.

Hibachi is a traditional Japanese heating device, modified in America to be a metal hot plate (called teppan in Japanese), so you might hear the word teppanyaki used as well.

If you have been to a hibachi restaurant in the past, you will already have a decent idea of what to expect from Happi Hibachi. The meat and potatoes of try operation, if you will, is a fried rice base featuring chicken, steak, shrimp or a combination of those as well as a selection of stir fried vegetables including onions, broccoli, carrots, zucchini and mushrooms. From there you might choose to augment with sauces like Yum Yum Sauce or some heat from chili sauce like Sriarcha.

At most events, they will also offer a selection of appetizers or side dishes to accompany your hibachi bowl. At our event both gyoza, also know as pot stickers, were available as were fried spring rolls. There are many other additional side options, and we'll get to those in a bit.

On board the truck, the duo, along with their hard working team, have the biggest portable rice cooker we've ever seen. They say they always have two massive batches of fresh rice ready for every event and will start more batches if the level of traffic looks to garner the need for more. Fifty-five cups of rice at a time takes 45 minutes. So you can make more as you need it, but you need to be able to look almost an hour ahead to predict that need.

They use fresh ribeye steaks in their meals; in fact, everything starts fresh each day the truck sets out. Reza painstakingly prepares all of the ingredients from scratch to get the flavor he's happy with. It's a lot of work. Starting early in the morning Reza cuts all of the vegetables for the day, never relying on pre-cut packaged veggies. He admits that the morning prep is the hardest part of the day. And that is saying something considering how hard I saw the whole crew working when I visited the truck at the Jule Intermodal Center's recent Food Truck Friday event. After two hours of cramped cooking in a confined space with



SUMO SPECIAL ENTRÉE

five bodies on a hot day, Reza didn't even look hot or tired. He looked like he was having a good time.

In addition to fresh meats, one thing that sets Reza apart from other hibachi restaurants is that he very proudly makes his own sauces for use in the truck. They don't buy pre-made teriyaki sauce from suppliers. Lindsey pointed out that she was surprised to learn that there were fresh roasted apples in teriyaki sauce. This is part of the hard prep work you never see when you are enjoying the fruits (and vegetables) of their labor.

I wondered how one plans for an event when you have to have so much fresh material ready in advance. How do they plan ahead for a crowd? For the event we visited, they had prepared about 50 pounds of chicken, for example, in addition to all of the steak, shrimp and cut veggies that were on hand. The answer is that you take a good guess, and you can always make more rice in the fly.

While they do have this big cool truck, there is another aspect of Happi Hibachi that should get many of you house party lovers and business owners excited. Reza and crew will come to your house, office or special event and cook for you right in front of your guests, teppanaki-style. They have a flat-top grill like you see in the restaurants, but this one is on wheels. So in addition to the great food, you and your guests can also still get the show which includes things like the onion fire volcano, juggling the spatulas and generally turning the cooking process into a skilled vaudeville act, which is always fun for the crowd.

In fact, on the day we visited, they had another private event the same night for 30 people in Peosta.



SPRING ROLLS



COOKING VEGETABLES ON THE FOOD TRUCK



PRIVATE EVENT SETUP



Smaller events do not require the truck, so the cooking and presentation can be much more low key, right in your back yard if you like. To get them to your private event, there is a base charge of about \$125 to show up, where they supply all of the plates and napkins and such and set up the portable hibachi on site to woo your guests. From there, the cost depends on what you want to serve. If you go with lowest cost, like chicken fried rice, it's about \$10 per person. But like their event later this day, there are a lot of options you can add to your experience, and not we're not just talking about adding shrimp and ribeye. You might serve an appetizer like chicken satay with all three meat options, vegetables and fried rice for closer to \$20 per person.

Additional offerings at this point include dishes such as chicken satay, chicken tempura, beef yakini (Japanese term that literally means "grilled meat" or as many think of it, Japanese Barbecue), bang bang shrimp, scallops, crab legs, lobster and more. Basically, if there's something special you want, just ask them and they'll probably be able to add it to the menu for your event. Reza has not yet started offering sushi, but it is on his "to-do" list.

The massive crowd-pleasing success of the truck at Jule's Food Truck Friday has been typical of the responses that the Happi Hibachi truck has been getting so far: big lines and happy customers. Lindsey says that at Fireworks on the River, the line wrapped around all over like crazy.

So far this spring and summer, Happi Hibachi has jumped right into the festival scene in Dubuque with a host of outdoor public events already lined up to feature their flavors. Upcoming events for them include: Dubuque... All the Jazz!, July's Millwork Night Market, and Asbury Music in the Park.

"I've got the best crew ever," says Lindsey as she looks over at the somewhat weary staff resting behind the truck following a 2+ hour onslaught of hungry Dubuquers testing their meddle.

From graduations to rehearsal dinners, they'll do it all. If it's over 50 people, they bring the whole truck not just the portable grill.

To try it for yourself without having to hire the whole crew to your house, check their Facebook page for a weekly schedule ([Facebook.com/HappiHibachi](https://www.facebook.com/HappiHibachi)). The "happy" problem so far is that demand has been so high out of the gate, they don't even have open dates just to set-up in random spots.

"For July, we didn't reach out to anyone to set up service because we have every lunch booked all month long," shared Lindsey. "So that's a nice problem to have. They're calling us."

Should they have open lunch dates, you'll be able to find out where they will be serving to the public that day by following them on social media.

The only thing better than finally chasing your dream is seeing it work out for you. And the Happi Hibachi team is firing on all burners.

"We're awesome; we've got a Hibachi truck!" ■



**HAPPI HIBACHI**

563-213-9906

[FACEBOOK.COM/HAPPIHIBACHI](https://www.facebook.com/HappiHibachi)

**Hours:** By appointment or as posted

**Prices:** \$4-\$10; various prices for group events

**SUBMIT YOUR DINING SUGGESTIONS!**

DO YOU HAVE A FAVORITE RESTAURANT YOU WOULD LIKE TO SEE US VISIT? PLEASE SEND US YOUR REQUESTS, SUGGESTIONS AND COMMENTS!  
EMAIL: [DINING@DUBUQUE365.COM](mailto:DINING@DUBUQUE365.COM)

**Conceptis Sudoku**

By Dave Green

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Difficulty Level ★★★★★

7/15

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PUZZLE ANSWERS ON PAGE 38

**WHERE'S GENERAL BOB?**

General Bob is out and about. Do you know where he's at?

