



SHRIMP BURRITO



CRAB BALLS



SEAFOOD BOIL BAG

# MILLENNIUM MARINA

BY BRYCE PARKS

We got more than one letter from *365ink* readers telling us that we need to try out Millennium Marina, especially after the ridiculously unfair season they have had to endure this year with all of the flooding. And since getting to all the marinas was on our list this summer anyway, we thought there's no time like the present.

Hidden away in East Dubuque, but literally just a minute off of the bridge (6<sup>th</sup> St. to Basten Rd.), Millennium Marina enjoys a great water view, sitting on a backwater inlet where scores of summer cottages line the shore. Once known as the Bent Prop, the property went into foreclosure and looked every bit the worse for the wear. But rumor had it that things are very different these days. Driving up the marina, the old place still looked like a bit of shack albeit with a very nice deck. But inside, it was clear that some serious love had gone into the upper floor venue.

A lovely, spunky, smiling ball of energy came to take our drink order and after giving it, I also asked if the owner was in. She replied, "That's me!" This may be the first restaurant we've ever reviewed where the owner seemed to be in such a good mood on a Wednesday afternoon, and she didn't even know that we were there to write about her.

The energetic smile belonged to Samantha Trentz, who, along with her husband Ryan, bought the property in April 2018. Starting with a food truck in June of last summer, they worked so hard to bring the property back to life. The indoor kitchen was ready by fall, and they remained open through the winter until the 2019 flood hit on March 17. And stayed... and stayed. They finally reopened June 24.

"It's been very choppy between the flood and the remodels," explains Samantha. "The first year has been a trial by fire (or water, if you will). For a reference of how bad this year's flood was, the previous time the flood stayed above 17 feet it did so for 34 days. This time it was almost 90 days. Having

the property, we always know it's going to flood, but you never dream it will flood to this degree."

"It was a foreclosed property, and you can imagine what it looked like when we purchased it. We completely gutted everything and re-did it." It's a nice, clean rustic remodel featuring an interesting aged tin and corrugated ceiling. "I wanted it to look like a river shack, but a clean one," she joked.

The multi-tiered deck looks very new. The framing was in place, but it now has a new covering of deck boards and railings and looks and feels new and safe. There are new transient boat slips for customers to pull off from the river and eat and drink and have a good time. They also un-sunk the covered slips and brought them back to life. The lower floor of the building is mostly just storage. So when the floodwaters retreat enough that you can actually drive-up, they can reopen very quickly. Although, this year Samantha says the water was just three inches from touching the second story, a real nail-biter.

But alas, the flood stopped there and finally uncovered the road. A new gravel lot and a ton of cleanup and finally—FINALLY—the 2019 season was open at Millennium Marina.

The business endeavor was somewhat of a new animal for Samantha who went to school for special effects makeup and was the beauty editor of a fashion magazine in Pittsburgh, PA before coming back to Dubuque, graduating from Capri, and starting her own salon business at age 23, The Kalon Salon which is still thriving on Asbury Rd. And then she opened Millennium, because, apparently, she's a glutton for punishment.

"I love business," she says as an explanation.

While she's never owned a restaurant before, she does have nine years of experience as a waitress, a job which will pretty much let you see everything there is to see in the profession, and she is also a self-described foodie. It shows.

With all of the renovations to the property, the food is really where Millennium shines. It was not at all what we expected from a little marina bar down by the river. No frozen pre-made food here. No huge list of deep fried-only appetizers that you see on every tired bar menu.

"Our slogan is savory, fresh, and scratch. I really don't believe in buying product from a food truck that

goes into your freezer and into a fryer. Everything we make here is homemade. So hand-cut chicken tenders, even our ranch dressing and honey cinnamon butter are homemade. It makes such a difference. Every morning we hand cut all of the potato chips for the day on a mandolin slicer as are our french fries."

The recipes are all Samantha's. Her mom also helps in the kitchen and has owned restaurants before, so she helps with the logistics of "how does this actually work?"

"So I came up with the crazy idea and Mama figures out how we achieve it. We like to travel a lot, so a lot of our menu is inspired off of the places that we've been and the things that we liked."

"For example, the crab balls are something that's unique to us. I love crab cakes but usually those are something you see at a more high-end restaurant and pan-fried. They're like a delicious mix of crab cakes and hush puppies. These are our way of taking that concept but tying in the river food aspects and making it accessible but still a little fancy."

The menu is not big, but it's all good. Appetizers include crab balls, cheese curds, seafood dip, deviled eggs, a deli tray, loaded nachos, pretzel bobbles (try 'em with the cinnamon butter!), and hand-cut chips and fries, all made fresh in house. A selection of dips for those items like french onion or jalapeño cheddar are also whipped up by hand, not out of a squeeze bottle.

Grilled kebabs are simple fresh and tasty. Fresh cut chicken, steak, shrimp, and veggies including onion, green pepper, tomatoes, and mushrooms are prepped every day and grilled old-school for a wonderful, real grilled kebob taste.

Simple but tasty sandwiches include burgers made how you like 'em, brats, Italian beef (yes Rich, they do have giardiniera on the side), chicken tenders, Trentz Tacos (beef or shrimp), and river wraps featuring chicken or portabella mushrooms. They also post burgers of the week on Facebook. They are usually outrageously decadent and delicious sounding, like the Tugboat Taco Burger, the River Monster burger, or the Drowning Pig, featuring five slices of bacon, two kinds of cheese, and BBQ sauce.

One popular special foodie feature at Millennium is their soon-to-be-famous Seafood Boil Bag. It's a traditional coastal mix of shrimp, mussels, crab, and sausage (pick 3),



OWNERS SAMANTHA AND RYAN TRENTZ



LOADED MARY



REMODELED INTERIOR

along with corn on the cob and red potatoes seasoned with your choice of Cajun, garlic, or Old Bay and drizzled with butter. The aroma is the perfect compliment to the nautical vibe of the whole place.

They currently have some summer specials added to the menu, and our favorite is definitely the shrimp burrito. I've had it a couple now and will have more in the future. Others include vegan nachos and a grilled pork ribeye.

You can also address your addiction to sweets with chocolate fondue, a Drunken Oreo sundae (alcoholic or not), or a scoop of ice cream (vegan options on the last two).

"The main thing is how different our food is. We believe in going back to the roots of how food should be. It's doesn't need to be pre-packaged and full of preservatives. We hand cut the veggies for our kabobs every single morning. Sometimes the food might take a little bit longer, but we're back there making it with love."

The food menu is topped off with a host of special mixed drinks they have whipped up just for the patrons with names like Dam Lemonade (slush option), Lighthouse, Hello Captain, margaritas, mojitos, sangrias, and a Loaded Mary that is exactly what you are picturing. It's a meal in a cup. It says so right on the

menu. This Bloody Mary includes a kabob, cheese curds, pickle, olive, and even half a brat. It's a bit top heavy, so handle with care. Plus a full bar, two dozen beers and spiked seltzers, and a selection of wines.

Burger night on Thursdays runs from 5 p.m. to close and features \$1 burgers with the purchase of a drink. Yeah, a buck! Toppings are extra. And enjoy \$1 off all alcoholic drinks on Fri-yay! There's usually live music in Saturday and Sunday afternoons too to round out the laid-back river life atmosphere.

Since the remodel, they also have paddle board and kayak rentals, both single and tandem kayaks for rent by the hour or all day.

"Our view too is something that's unique. There are not many restaurants that have this view when you are enjoying your meal. I take pride in the fact that I believe in our food, and I want to eat our food."

I want to eat your food too!

A lot of river restaurants close in the winter but not this crew. Millennium Marina will be open all winter, Thursday through Sunday. And it seems so out of the way, but it really is literally a couple minutes off of Highway 20, just off the bridge. You CAN come for lunch and not take forever, so drop anchor soon and tell them 365ink sent ya! ■



**MILLENNIUM MARINA**  
780 HARBOR DR, EAST  
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815-554-6196  
MILLENNIUMMARINA.COM  
Hours: Wed-Sat: 11 AM-10 PM;  
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