

SILVER SPOON RESTAURANT

BY BRYCE PARKS

There's a fresh breeze coming off of Frentress Lake in East Dubuque, IL, and it's not just because of the high water. The Silver Spoon Restaurant has undergone somewhat of a transformation in the off season, and if you've never been or it's been a while, it's time to fix that. For summer 2019, the Silver Spoon is running on all cylinders but only offering the amazing new menu Thursday through Sunday.

In the 3rd season of operation, there has been a lot of renewal at Silver Spoon. Call it re-visioning or expansion or just starting over. The basic fact is, Silver Spoon 2019 is not the same restaurant you visited last year. An amazing new chef, new amenities, and new staff all started with a new General Manager, Aundie Schwager-Koppes.

"We've teamed up with the Pettigout family that owns Frentress Lake Marina, and we took off from there, shooting ideas back and forth and feeding off each other. We're creating more of a resort atmosphere, more family-friendly amenities, and catering a little bit to every genre."

The land and building that once housed the Silver Eagle Casino is owned by the Pettigout family who leases the portion of the venue that houses the restaurant to owner/operator Chris Staver, who also owns the very tasty Copper Kettle restaurant in Dubuque's north end neighborhood. If you have not been there, you're also missing out on something great.

"My background is business and management," says Aundie, "and I've gone into businesses before and helped bring them back to life. I was Food and Beverage Manager at Lacoma Golf Course for almost six years and helped put them on the map for a while. I think this venue needed to be revamped all around—the service, the food, the drinks, all of it together."

"It's a modern, sleek decor, not your everyday patio feeling. You can feel comfortable coming in casual but also feel right at home if you dress up for a nice date inside or out and have a couple of martinis. Chris did such a great job on how he designed everything; he's got such a great idea."

Outside of the decor, almost everything else is new. A nearly all new staff, starting with the acquisition of one of the most talented chefs in the Tri-State area: Chad Myers. We've enjoyed Chad's work at some other venues over the last decade and have always been very impressed. This was a major coup of an acquisition for the Silver Spoon, and you are able to reap the rewards.

A Le Cordon Bleu trained chef, Chef Chad has sharpened his knives and skills at places like Q Casino,



SALSA VERDE WET BURRITO

Hotel Julien, Waterstreet Market in Bellevue, and most recently as the chef at the Dubuque Golf & Country Club. With a front and back of house facelift already underway at Silver Spoon, Chad came in a bit later on in the season but worked quickly with fellow kitchen wizard Alejandro, from Brazil, to put together a great new, exciting yet accessible menu, perfect for summer.

"We're trying to be as authentic as possible, especially with our Mexican/South American features," says Chad. "We're also using really top-quality ingredients. My burger is a great brisket blend. I actually make my own American cheese in house from a recipe I got from one of my chef friends. It's like Velveeta but properly seasoned. It takes the burger to the next level. And the bacon is hand-cut Nueske's bacon."

If you know that name, you know it's famous amongst true bacon lovers for being one of the very best around. All bacons are not created equal. Make it taste as good as you can and people will appreciate it. With all of the creative options on the menu, we were surprised when chef Chad told us his favorite thing by far on the new menu was his bacon cheeseburger. So you know that thing has got to be some kind of next level goodness. You'll just have to go over to Silver Spoon and find out for yourself.

"I'm justly trying to do it all right. Approachable but done well. Over time, I think we can do some fancy things and show some curveballs, host some special tasting events, but right now we're just getting our feet wet and earning our reputation for the new menu."

"One of the reasons I left the Country Club was that I missed cooking for the public and sharing my food with everyone. Sometimes I'd put in hours making something very special and then I didn't sell any. It was not an adventurous dining crowd. And I'd



BURNT ENDS

like to get back to feeding people who want try something new. I'm happy have an outlet again."

The menu will be set as is for a while as they get started and then will evolve with feedback from patrons and the change of seasons.

We visited a couple of times since they opened just over a week ago, once for dinner and once for lunch (Friday through Sunday). Getting a seat on the patio was a lot easier at lunch, and it's really not that far from downtown Dubuque if you have a flexible Friday lunch hour.

An appetizer menu that includes such standbys as wings, nachos, guac, and quesadillas also sports some less mainstream goodies including a killer South of the Border Shrimp Cocktail, or check out Chad's signature smoked CAB Brisket Brunt Ends with a spicy maple glaze and fries. Just get two of those right off the bat. And the Fried Green BLT features a fried green tomato topped with smoked gouda pimento cheese, tomato jam and, of course, some of that magical Nueske's bacon. It's as pretty as it is delicious. We also loved the shrimp empanadas and their pineapple habanero dipping sauce. Just the perfect amount of sweet heat on that savory treat!

Chad already promised you that his bacon cheeseburger will change your life, so it could be hard to stray to their other sandwich offerings which include a salmon burger, a seared salmon avocado wrap, and a carnitas pork sandwich.

With so many Mexican/South American highlights on the menu, you just know they had to have a selection of what people these days are calling street tacos, featuring dreamy ingredients on two hand-size corn tortillas, not quite soft shell and also not quite crispy. A nice in-between to hold five diverse flavors: carnitas, baja fish, shrimp, rojo chicken, and carne asada (steak).





SOUTH OF THE BORDER SHRIMP COCKTAIL



BACON CHEESEBURGER



CHICKEN & BACON KEBAB



SOME SIDE DISH OPTIONS: MAPLE GLAZED BRUSSELS SPROUTS WITH BACON AND SHITAKE MUSHROOMS, STREET CORN SALAD, AND VEGETABLE COLESLAW WITH PINEAPPLE

Each has its own specially prepared sauces to finish off the flavor including baja sauce, cilantro-lime sauce, picante, and queso fresco. Some even have chicharron (pork cracklings) for additional flavor and texture.

Those authentic Mexican style salvos Chad was talking about come out in their entrée features from the fajitas and tex-mex burrito to Aundie's favorite thing on the menu: the Salsa Verde Wet Burrito. It features chicken or steak with sautéed peppers and onions, then smothered in salsa verde, crema, and queso fresco, and somehow maintained inside a tortilla wrapper. We enjoy the simplicity of the bacon-wrapped fajita seasoned chicken skewers. Maybe it was that pineapple habanero dipping sauce again. And don't forget about the chimichurri bistrot filet (beef) and beautiful lemon dill salmon featuring chimichurri gilled potatoes and a lemon dill vinaigrette.

"I think all of our helpings are very generous here. It will fill you up," promises Aundie. "Early reviews have been amazing. I'm so excited about the feedback I've gotten in this first week being open. For the service, the food, the drinks, and the cleanliness of everything. I thrive on cleanliness."

Often times, side dishes on food reviews get less love, and that's because a lot of menus don't put as much thought into them. Not so at Silver Spoon. In fact, they brought us samples of side dishes specifically because they didn't want us to overlook them. The refreshing sweet corn salad and vegetable coleslaw with pineapple were great takes on old favorites, and the South of the Border Rice is a special recipe that Alejandro brought with him. But man, those maple glazed Brussels sprouts with Nueske's Bacon and shitake mushrooms could be an entrée all by themselves. One order was generous but still not enough. They're like veggie candy. Even if you don't like Brussel sprouts, welcome to liking Brussels sprouts.

We have not yet explored their drink menu, but they have indeed revamped it with a wide variety of specialty and mixed drinks. So if you are a lover of spirits, you'll have to explore that for yourself.

Even the desserts cater to the south with fried ice cream and churros being offered. Good luck saving room for that!

The restaurant isn't the only thing that's been re-imagined for 2019. Fretress Lake Marina itself put a lot of time and money into awesome new features and amenities to serve a growing clientele. There is a brand new swimming pool with a bath house just behind the restaurant portion of the building which also houses the marina offices and retail. Fretress lake marina members and campground members are invited to use the pool, perfect for before or after your meal (we suggest before, you know... the whole waiting 30 minutes to swim thing). You can't see the pool from the restaurant patio, but it's close by.

There is also a half court basketball court and two very scenery-heavy sand volleyball courts just in front of the outdoor patio seating at the restaurant by the water. What a gorgeous setting for a little outdoor fun. This year's volleyball league is already filled for the year on Thursday nights, but you can come play on the courts at other times at no charge.

"We have over 100 campers on permanent sites sold-out for the summer with 30 more on a waiting list. So we're possibly looking to expand in the future," shares Aundie. "We have a great fire pit by the water that is accessible to our patrons to use."

The marina also added a kayak launch with kayak rentals right next to the restaurant by the water. You can also rent a boat from the marina to use on the river. How about a great excursion on the water combined with a fantastic lunch or dinner at either end of your trip? It's a little staycation right in your backyard. This is not a typical marina restaurant; it's a great restaurant that just happens to be next to a marina.

They're also adding new transient boat docks for visitors to tie up and enjoy dinner, having finally removed the big barge platform that was leftover from the days of the Silver Eagle Casino docking platform. There are a lot of docks. There's room for you!

They have been doing a lot of big parties and can cater your special events on-site from benefits to birthday parties. Reservations are recommended but not necessary. The outdoor patio seats about 75 and fills up pretty quick on summer nights, so that would be a reason to call ahead. You'll find causal live music on the patio even couple of weeks.

It's hidden away. It's a destination. You won't drive by and think of it because you can't really see it. You need to want to come here. They're working to flood social media with reminders they are here. With a beautiful, secluded water-site venue comes the challenge of reminding people that you are open for business. But this is one place that is worth taking the time to go out of your way to enjoy. Turn east off of Highway 20 at Fretress Lake Rd. Cross over both sets of railroad tracks before turning right on Gill Rd. There will be a sign at the correct turn.

"Once people come once, I know they're going to come back. They're going to love it." ■



SILVER SPOON RESTAURANT

818 WEST GILL RD, EAST, DUBUQUE, IL
815-554-6210

FACEBOOK.COM/SILVERSPONEATERY

Hours: Tue-Wed (Bar Only): 4 PM-Midnight;
Thu: 4 PM-Midnight; Fri-Sun: 11 AM-Midnight; Mon: Closed

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