

RIVER ROCK KITCHEN AND TAP

BY RICH BELMONT

On December 30, 2015 a new restaurant opened in the Holiday Inn, downtown Dubuque. It has twelve craft beers from the tri-states area on tap, several wines on tap (I will explain later), and my foodie friends, the food is too good to be enjoyed just by the hotel guests.

It's called River Rock Kitchen and Tap because it is close to the Mississippi River where there is a lot of river rock. Some of that rock can be seen in the columns behind the bar!

The hotel and restaurant is owned by Dubuque Hotel Partners who are members of the Kinseth family. Kinseth Hospitality Companies headquartered in North Liberty, IA provides hotel management for over 75 hotels throughout the Midwest.

The restaurant is still new. In fact the grand opening was just held on March 15th. So the staff is still working on ironing out some of the kinks: like evaluating the current menu to include even more local food favorites.

This won't take long because the management is not only talented and experienced they have all been at this same hotel for a long time.



The General Manager is Norm Granback. He started his career over 50 years ago at the Stouffer Hotel in Oak Brook, IL. He has been General Manager of Holiday

Inn Dubuque/Galena for 9 years. Dee McNamer is the Food and Beverage Director. She worked at Perkins Restaurant and Bakery for 13 years and was the General Manager for 8 of those years. She has been here now for 10 years. The Kitchen Manager, Tammy Hammel, started at the Dodge House when she was 16. She then worked in food service at Dubuque Greyhound Park. She started here 23 years ago when it was called the Clarion Hotel. (The Clarion Hotel converted to a Holiday Inn in 1994).



Ryan Dix is the guy you see all the time in the front of the house. He began his career in a Pizza Hut when he was only 15. Then he worked at Kentucky Fried Chicken

and The Tollbridge in Dubuque. He is the Restaurant Service Manager and has been at this Holiday Inn for 10 years now.

There are 12 beers on tap. They are mostly from breweries in the Tri-State area. Available choices are changed frequently but here are a few of the current offerings:

- Pure Malt Cave, Potosi Brewing, Potosi, WI
- Annabelle's IPA, Galena Brewing, Galena, IL
- Hard Cider, Sutliff Cider Company, Lisbon, IA
- Schokoklade, Millstream, Amana, IA
- Blonde Fatale, Peace Tree, Knoxville, IA
- IPA, Exile Brewing, Des Moines, IA
- Sheer Madness, Kalona Brewery, Kalona, IA
- Gold Coin, Backpocket, Coralville, IA

There is also a nice selection of premium wines. And lucky me, some of my favorites are currently in stock including:

- Columbia Merlot, Columbia Valley, WA
- Cupcake Shiraz, Cupcake, Australia
- Park Farm Mississippi River Red, Bankston, IA
- Diamond Pinot Grigio, Frances Coppola, Sonoma, CA

There are even some I never had until now but I really like such as the Chateau Recougne (ray-coon) Bordeaux, France.

I say several of these wines are on tap because eight of them are stored in the wine dispensing system. It's called Wine Emotion and it is from Firenze, Italy. As wine is pumped out of the bottle it is replaced by food grade argon gas. This inert gas prevents the wine from exposure to air eliminating the possibility of oxidation. The system also maintains both red and white wines at proper temperatures.

Happy Hour is 3 pm to 6 pm Monday through Friday. All well drinks, beers and house wines are half price and the appetizer of the day is only \$6.00.

River Rock Kitchen and Tap is a sports bar, too. There are 12 flat screen TV's so you can watch all your favorite teams. And some of the available snacks are the favorite foods of very popular school mascots. See if you can find:

- Cy - Cy the Cardinal, Iowa State University
- Herky - Herky the Hawk, University of Iowa
- Bucky - Bucky the Badger, University of Wisconsin, Madison (Fun Fact: Bucky's full name is Buckingham U. Badger)



The appetizers are designed to be eaten any time. You can order them as starters for lunch or dinner and as snacks.

Here is a sampling of some of the tastiest apps you will find in Dubuque!



Guacamole - You will have some fun when you order this one. Your server mashes ripe avocados with lime juice, garlic, onion, tomatoes and cilantro right at your table. Shown here is my guacamole being expertly prepared by Kelly.



Shrimp Ceviche (seh-VEE-chay) - This Latin American recipe calls for raw fish (or other seafood) to be marinated in either lemon or lime juice. The acid in the citrus juice effectively cooks the fish. Here in this

restaurant, though, shrimp is blanched first to cook it. Then it is marinated in lime juice with avocado and cucumber.

Fresh Cut Home-Made Potato Chips with Bleu Cheese and melted mozzarella cheese.

Hot Wings - Jumbo chicken wings served with either Buffalo Sauce or Chipotle BBQ Sauce.

Dixie Fingers - This is my favorite. Chicken breasts are sliced into thin strips then hand breaded and lightly fried. Served with Chipotle BBQ Sauce, Ranch or Honey Mustard Sauce.

Pork Belly - Thick cut braised pork belly (uncured bacon) is covered with Sriracha sauce and pure maple syrup glaze.

Iowa Cheese Curds - fresh curds hand dipped in a craft beer batter.

The salads are made to order and only fresh ingredients are used. Margie was really happy with the Cobb Salad. It's a non-traditional Cobb because it includes smoked turkey and ham in addition to the usual components of hard boiled egg, avocado, tomato, bacon and blue cheese. These ingredients are all laid out in neat rows over baby greens. Can you imagine a salad that is almost too pretty to eat? Here's a little tip from Margie: the salads are huge so all you really need is a half salad. And all the half salads can be made into wraps made with fresh tortillas.



Many of the lunch items are as unusual as they are tasty. Take for example:

Chicken Club Milanese - a chicken breast is flattened, dipped in egg, Panko bread crumbs and fried in butter. Then it is placed between slices of grilled Texas toast with thick cut bacon, Swiss cheese and a dollop of homemade cilantro lime dressing.

Chipotle Pepper Penne - chopped chipotle peppers, tomato and cilantro is tossed with penne pasta and a creamy chipotle sauce.

Pork Tacos - braised pork shoulder, pork belly and Pico de Gallo is covered with Cotija (ko-tee-ka) cheese. It is unusual to see Cotija in this area. It's a Mexican cow's milk cheese named for the town of Cotija in the state of Michoacán.

Classic Grilled Reuben - corned beef briskets roasted in the kitchen are hand sliced. Then slices are placed on grilled rye bread with sauerkraut and Swiss cheese. This is a traditional Reuben because it contains Russian dressing rather than the more common Thousand Island dressing. Russian dressing is made from mayonnaise and ketchup and other ingredients such as pimentos and horseradish. Thousand Island is a mayonnaise base but no ketchup and typically other ingredients including olives, onions, eggs and pickles.

Fun Fact: Russian dressing was invented by James Colburn in New Hampshire and is not related to Russia in any way. Thousand Island dressing was invented by Sophia LaLonde, the wife of a fishing guide, who lived in the Thousand Islands Region located along both sides of the US and Canada border.

The talents and experience of Dee McNamer and Tammy Hammel are on full display with their choices for dinner entrées. For example:

Cedar Plank Salmon: They like to use Scottish farm raised Atlantic salmon. It has a juicier and better flavor and so much more so when it is topped with fresh homemade basil pesto.

Amish Chicken: They prefer the flavor of Amish chicken and their supplier provides them with an Amish airline breast: a boneless chicken breast with drumette attached. (This is the meaty part of the wing resembling a drumstick).



Mac N Cheese: The "mac" used here is penne pasta mixed with a sauce of parmesan, blocks of sharp cheddar and shredded cheddar cheese.



Steaks: They are charbroiled and so flavorful they do not require any special seasonings. Both the Ribeye and Kansas City Strip are bone-in for extra flavor. I highly recommend you ask for the Mushroom Medley with your steak. Chopped portabella and button mushrooms are simply grilled on a flat top in butter. These mushrooms are so delicious by themselves but are even better on a great steak!



Heritage Breed Double Cut Pork Chop: For more pork flavor enlightened chefs are now choosing Heritage Breed hogs. Heritage Breeds are the heirloom tomatoes of the pig world. They are not crossbred so they are fatter and

therefore their meat is juicier and more "porky" flavored than typical grocery store brand pork. At River Rock the chops are brown sugar brined and finished with compound butter.

Don't forget to ask your server for the evening's dessert choices. On a recent visit I had a difficult time deciding if I needed (well, ok, wanted) Turtle Cheesecake, Apple or Berry Tart, Lava Cake, or Wiggle Whiskey Bundt Cake. I chose this last one because I wanted to see if it really wiggled. It did not but it had a great whiskey flavor complimented by the chopped walnuts on top.



The Holiday Inn and River Rock Kitchen and Tap is a great place to hold your private party. They have 3 rooms for 5 to 32 people and 2 ballrooms each accommodating up to 250 guests.

RIVER ROCK KITCHEN AND TAP

450 MAIN STREET, DUBUQUE, IA 52001 • 563-556-2000
RIVERROCKKITCHENANDTAP.COM
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Hours: Mon-Fri: 6:30 AM-Midnight; Sat: 7 AM-2 AM; Sun: 7 AM-10 PM; Kitchen closes 10 PM all days

Dining Style: Casual

Noise Level: Comfortable

Recommendations: Guacamole; Shrimp Ceviche; Dixie Fingers; Chili; Cobb Salad; Chipotle Pepper Penne; Herky's Mac & Cheese; Amish Chicken; Chicken Club Milanese; Hold Em ½ Pound Burger; Cedar Plank Salmon; Take Down Short Ribs; Dry Rub Ribs; Play All Day Sunrise Burger; Bone-In Ribeye; Bone-In KC Strip; Heritage Breed Double Cut Pork Chop; Apple Tart; Lava Cake.

Liquor Service: Premium Bar; 12 Beers on Tap; Wine Dispensing System

Prices: Breakfast: \$3.29-\$12.99; Lunch: \$6.95-\$13.95; Dinner: \$9.95-\$29.95

Pay Options: Cash, Debit, All Credit Cards, No Checks, ATM on Premises

Accessibility: Front and Back Doors, Restrooms

Kids Policy: Menu: Yes, Highchair: Yes; Booster: Yes

Reservations: Yes • **Catering:** On Premises Only

Take Out: Yes • **Delivery:** No • **Parking:** Private Lot