Come as you are

the barn

by Rich Belmont

The Barn
When Argosy’s Food For Thought reader Laura Dague contacted me to let me know The Barn had really good food of course I was skeptical. Especially after I found out she has worked there as a server and cook for over 7 years. And besides, how good could this place be when it is located in Sherrill, Iowa, a town with a population of only 177 people! And it must be inside a barn, right?

So, ok, I decided to give Laura the benefit of the doubt and go check. The Barn out for myself. It’s only 9.5 miles and a 15 minute drive from Dubuque City Hall. It’s easy to get to. Just take Highway 52 North to Sageville and turn right onto Sherrill Road. You will see it on the left just after you enter Sherrill. The first thing you notice is it’s not in a barn. In fact the building never was. It was originally a hotel and general store. Laura is right too, the food is delicious!

Victor Breitbach (known to all his customers as “V”) and his wife Donna took over the store around 1960 and turned it into a bar and restaurant. They operated The Barn for 32 years and all 10 of their children worked there at one time or another.

Fourteen years ago their son, Jeff Breitbach (left), took control and he has continued to run it the same way his parents did. The mission is and always has been to serve copious amounts of good tasting food for as little money as possible.

One of the neat things about The Barn is it is open eighteen and a half hours every day (except 15 on Sunday) and the kitchen is always open the whole time. That’s why you never encounter any hungry people around Sherrill.

I have discovered I truly enjoy starting my day at The Barn. A two egg and cheese sandwich is only $2.49 and an English muffin sandwich with one egg, cheese and choice of ham, bacon or sausage is only $3.99. I like to order the Country Breakfast (above) consisting of two eggs, sausage patty, hash browns and toast or the Farm Hand Breakfast Sandwich with two eggs, cheese and ham, bacon or sausage on Texas toast. The Breakfast Menu has many more choices including Ham Steak and Eggs, French Toast, Bureltos and several three-egg Omelets.

The Barn has a whole list of appetizers. In fact, there are 17 different items so you are certain to find some you like. The Chicken Wings are quite tasty as are the Onion Rings, Chicken Strips, Potato Skins and Nachos Supreme. I, myself, can make a whole meal out of fried Battered Green Beans, Cauliflower Florets coated with crisp cheddar cheese breading and Broccoli Cheddar Bites. This last one is a mix of oven baked potatoes, bacon, cheddar cheese and onions in a crisp potato breading.

On a recent visit members of my tasting team enjoyed a fresh baked and made to order pizza. You can build your own version of a pizza by specifying either regular or thin crust and requesting your favorite toppings selected from a list of 15 of them. There are a number of specialty pizzas as well. My tasters chowed down on a large one-half Chicken Bacon Alfredo and one-half Meat & More Meat. When you are really hungry try the Cliffy Special. This starts out as a Supreme Pizza containing sausage, pepperoni, mushrooms, onions, peppers, black and green olives. Then extra everything is added. It is named after Doc Steve Clifford who first ordered this monstrosity.

The sandwiches are called Specialties and that’s because they are all quite special. They are served on toasted Kaiser buns, toasted hoagie rolls or grilled Texas toast. Examples include the Chicken (left) or Steak Supreme containing strips of grilled chicken breast or beefsteak topped with sautéed onions, mushrooms, green peppers and melted mozzarella and American cheese on a hoagie; breaded pork tenderloin with lettuce, tomato, pickle and onion on a Kaiser bun; Texas Chicken breast topped with Swiss and American cheese, bacon, lettuce, tomato and mayo on grilled Texas toast.

On week days there is a lunch buffet. It usually has fried chicken and another blue ribbon lunch plate. On my last visit the daily lunch special was Beef Tips and Noodles, Mashed Potatoes and Green Beans (right). I won’t mention any prices but I must tell you the Publisher of 365ink who says he is on a diet happily devoured a pound of Prime Rib roasted low and slow for 3 hours. I’ll ask for it Blackened which means it will be slathered in butter and Cajun seasonings and seared in a skillet. Hey, maybe I will go all out and order the Prime Rib and Shrimp Combo!

The beef and pork dinners are exceptionally tasty and are supremely satisfying. For example the Pork Chop dinner includes 2 half pound smoked center cut chops and the Ham Steak dinner (above) is a humongous slice of Farmland ham grilled and topped with pineapple and brown sugar. You can’t possibly go wrong with the steaks either. They are always fresh, never frozen, USDA Choice grade. One night I was very pleased with a New York Strip and Fried Shrimp Combo (left) and on another night I happily devoured a pound of fresh ground Hamburger Steak (below) smothered with sautéed onions and mushrooms. Next Saturday night I expect I will be digging into a pound of Prime Rib roasted low and slow for 3 hours. I’ll ask for it Blackened which means it will be slathered in butter and Cajun seasonings and seared in a skillet. Hey, maybe I will go all out and order the Prime Rib and Shrimp Combo!

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So thank you Laura Dague for suggesting I visit The Barn. This restaurant wasn’t on my radar and now thanks to you it has been placed on my highly recommended list!

Do you have a favorite restaurant you would like to see reviewed? Please send your requests, suggestions and comments to Argosy at argamark@emchis.com.