



## Fat Tuesday's

by Rich Belmont

I must admit I have driven by Fat Tuesday's on University Avenue in Dubuque several times a week for many years. Only recently, though, did I stop and actually go in the place. I was curious because I always saw people going in and out and I noticed on some nights, particularly Fridays there were a lot of cars parked all around it. I had been told Fat Tuesday's had good food and the Nightly Specials were good deals. Now I know the people who told me these things were right!



Rick Hirsch (call him Rico) has been the owner of this bar and restaurant for 15 and a half years. (Pictured with wife Stacey and children Tanner and Madison). Rico graduated from University of Wisconsin at Platteville in 1987 with a degree in business. While in school he was a bartender and cook at Elk's Lodge and Timbers, both in Platteville. He discovered he liked the hospitality business so he began working as a bartender, cook, waiter and manager at several restaurants in Dubuque including Chi Chi's, the Yardarm, Lombardi's and Fat Tuesday's. He enjoyed being at this last one so much he purchased it on October 7, 1997.

I should have known Fat Tuesday's was so much more than just a bar. After all, the people of Dubuque had just voted it the Best Place for Cajun Cuisine for the ninth time in the Hospice of Dubuque Best Fest 2013 contest. It has also won three 1st Place and a few 2nd and 3rd place awards in the Dubuque County Historical Society's Taste of Dubuque events over the last few years.



The first page of the menu describes the Drink Specials and Nightly Specials. Happy Hour is from 3 pm to 6 pm Monday through Saturday. The Nightly Specials are the same every week except for the Friday Special that changes each week. For example, Monday is Taco night (three flavors pictured above). A soft shell four tortilla has the usual taco fillings plus you can choose to add beef, chicken, andouille sausage, shredded BBQ pork, spicy shrimp or fried fish.

Tuesday brings an especially good deal on deep fried chicken wings (at right); Wednesday is Muffuletta night; Thursday is Nacho Grande Night (below) and Friday is Fish and Chip with fried cod and fries. These specials have reduced prices and are exceptional values.



The next page is the appetizer section. There are 16 items on this page alone! There are some usual bar standards such as Cheese Curds, Onion Rings, Mini Tacos and Fries. But then there are some unusual ones like Fried Crawfish Tails, Fat's Mac & Cheese Bread, Fat's Tomato Bread and Fat's Taco Bread.

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Then there are the chicken wings. Aaah, the Wings! I really like these wings! They are ordered in one, two or three pound quantities and there are numerous dipping sauces you can choose to go with them. In fact, the first time I ordered wings I ordered one pound and everybody at the table grabbed them and I only got one. So when I ordered my entrée I asked for an additional pound of wings as a side dish. This time I hoarded them and ate them all by myself! I asked Rico why they are so good and he replied it's because the very light breading is just thick enough to hold the dipping sauces.

The next page in the menu is a listing of all kinds of Tacos, Nachos, Enchiladas and Quesadillas. By now you will start to notice this restaurant inside a bar specializes in Mexican and Cajun food. Rico has used his 25 years experience to develop his own interpretations of Mexican and New Orleans dishes.

For example, the Enchiladas come in typical Mexican combinations such as beef, chicken or shrimp. Then there are more unusual ones with andouille, a mild pork flavored sausage made right in Dubuque by Haun's Specialty Meats. Also, Chicken Cordon Bleu with chicken, ham and Swiss cheese; BBQ Chicken with fried chicken strips, BBQ and Enchilada sauce; and BBQ Pork topped with coleslaw and BBQ sauce instead of sour cream.

The Quesadillas (right) are two flour tortillas stuffed with your choice of the same ingredients available in enchiladas plus cheddar and mozzarella cheese which are then grilled. Margie's favorite is the Shrimp Club Quesadilla that is filled with shrimp, bacon, lettuce and tomato.



### Fat Tuesday's

1121 University Avenue, Dubuque, IA 52001  
563-557-0867

**HOURS:** Bar: Mon - Sat: 3 p.m. - 2 a.m. Sun: Closed  
Kitchen: Mon - Fri: 5 - 9:30 pm Sat: 5 - 9 p.m. (limited menu)  
Sun: Closed (available for private parties)

**DINING STYLE:** Come as you are

**NOISE LEVEL:** Conversational, louder on weekends

**RECOMMENDATIONS:** Chicken Wings, Tacos, Pork Tenderloin, Burgers, Shrimp Club Quesadilla, Muffuletta, Fat's Cajun Griddle, Blackened Salmon, Crab Cake Po'Boy, All Friday Specials

**LIQUOR SERVICE:** Full Bar, Bloody Mary, Hurricane

**PRICES:** \$2.75 - \$13.00

**PAY OPTIONS:** Cash, MasterCard, Visa, Discover, ATM

**ACCESSIBILITY:** Ramp to Front Door and Restroom

**KIDS POLICY:** Menu, High Chair & Booster

**RESERVATIONS:** No **CATERING:** Yes - up to 200

**TAKE OUT:** Yes **DELIVERY:** No **PARKING:** On street



There is a whole menu section on salads (above), sides and gumbo. The stand-out in this group is the Chicken and Sausage Gumbo (below). Although gumbo is usually served as a stew with white rice on the side in this restaurant it arrives more like a soup. A chicken broth is cooked with the "Holy Trinity" of onions, bell peppers and celery along with garlic, white rice and Cajun seasoning. Each cup or bowl of this delicious gumbo is overflowing with large chunks of chicken and andouille sausage. I highly recommend it and I am so happy Rico has decided to keep it on the menu all year!



There are at least eleven burgers on the menu. Of course you can always build your own but I think you are missing the boat if you don't try one of Fat's specialty burgers. They are all good but I particularly like the unusual ones like Fat's Blue that is blackened burger with red onions and bleu cheese dressing or the Blackened Tomato Burger with blackened tomato and Parmesan Peppercorn Ranch dressing. Or my favorite, the Burger from Hell! No seriously, that is what it's called and it is comprised of a blackened burger with sautéed onions, fried jalapeños, cheese and hot sauce (at right). When you first bite into this burger all the flavors come together and you don't think it is so hot but then the heat catches up to you. The sauce is called Sweet Heat and it is one of the sauces available for the wings too. If you like hot stuff like me (come to think of it, my mom used to always say I thought I was hot stuff) you will love this burger! By the way, you can choose American, pepper jack, provolone or Swiss cheese for your burger but of course you will want the pepper jack on the Burger from Hell.



You can also order some interesting sandwiches at Fat Tuesday's. The Pork Tenderloin is very popular. So are the Blackened Chicken Breast, Fish, Pulled Pork and Pit Ham Sandwiches. The real stars on the sandwich menu, though, are the Po'Boys. These are New Orleans style subs on Fat's toasted garlic bread and stuffed with your choice of catfish, andouille sausage, spicy shrimp, crab cakes (right), deep fried crawfish or BBQ pork.



And then there is the Muffuletta (left). It is not quite the same as the New Orleans Central Grocery's original but it's close enough. It is filled with smoked pit ham, Genoa salami, provolone cheese and olive salad. A traditional Muffuletta is served cold but this version is baked just enough to melt the cheese. If you close your eyes when you bite into this sandwich you will think you actually are in New Orleans.



Of course, I have saved the best for last. These are the dinner entrees and there are some in on the list you wouldn't think would be served in a bar. For instance, Fat's Cajun Griddle featuring a blackened chicken breast, spicy shrimp, andouille sausage, red onions, mushrooms, green peppers and rice topped with a Jack Daniels glaze. The blackened Salmon filet (below) is delicious particularly when you spread some of that Jack Daniels reduction sauce on it. The Blackened Chicken Breasts are also very tasty indeed.



The Friday Night Specials are usually rotated every few weeks. They are always something exciting and always scrumptious. In recent weeks there was a Shrimp or Chicken Scampi, Blackened Swordfish Steak and last week either Regular or Blackened Prime Rib. I ordered the regular which was superbly seasoned and cooked to the precise temperature I requested. The Friday Special appears each week in the Dubuque Advertiser so when I see the Prime Rib (below) come up again you can be sure I will show up for the blackened version. In the meantime I am looking forward to this Friday's Special of Smoked Pork Chops.

By now you certainly noticed the term Blackened comes up in the menu description frequently. Blackened is a cooking technique often associated with Cajun cuisine. That's because the method was popularized by Chef Paul Prudhomme in New Orleans in the mid 1970's. Beef, fish, chicken, shrimp and even vegetables can be blackened. The food is dipped in melted butter and then dredged in a mixture of herbs and spices, usually some combination of thyme, peppercorns, oregano, chili pepper, salt, garlic powder and onion powder. It is then seared in a very hot skillet. The result is a black crust resulting from the mixture of milk solids from the butter and the charred spices. No doubt Rico keeps winning awards for Cajun cuisine because through years of experience and trial and error he has developed his own unique blend of Cajun herbs and spices. Blackened dishes are truly the signature dishes of his restaurant!

You don't have to go to Mardi Gras to enjoy New Orleans cuisine. Fat Tuesday's is right here in Dubuque!

