



## Mason Dixon Saloon

by Rich Belmont



In June, 2010 when Dennis Hefel and his son, Joe, opened their saloon on Main Street many people thought it had a strange name. After all, the Mason-Dixon Line was surveyed between 1763 and 1767 by Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon in a resolution of a border dispute between British colonies. It forms parts of the borders of Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware and West Virginia. And all those states are a long ways from Dubuque, Iowa!

But over the years the Mason-Dixon Line has come to symbolize a cultural boundary between the Northeastern United States and the Southern United States. In picking that name Dennis and Joe were declaring their saloon was a place where we could experience a bit of Southern hospitality in a rustic environment.



Certainly, this bar and restaurant is an interesting place to visit. There are beautiful stone columns in between whiskey barrel columns against the walls. The masonry was done by Dennis Hefel's sons Jim and Jay. Dennis himself did the barrel columns. He had to cut recycled Kentucky whiskey barrels in half. This was no small feat considering they are made from individual narrow slats held together by iron rings. It was Joe's idea to mount lights over the bar in logs removed from his father's farm. He also designed the red lighting under the steps and bars. Mike Breitbach Construction of Dubuque crafted the tables and both upper and lower bars from cedar.

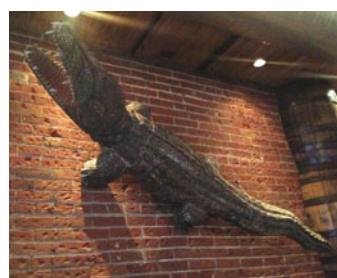
While you are enjoying Mason Dixon Saloon's atmosphere check out the fascinating artifacts. Dennis made the salt and pepper holders out of horse and pony shoes he copper plated. A Texas longhorn skull is on display and the antique liquor store sign was sold to them by Mike Wolfe of Antique Archaeology in LeClaire, IA on an episode of the American Pickers TV show. Joe and his Chief Financial Officer,



Kari Denahy, who also happens to be his fiancée, are always on the lookout for exciting items to add to the décor.

I have studied the shot glass collection on more than one occasion. Dennis

began accumulating them on his honeymoon in 1970. They are from such diverse locations such as Niagara Falls, Pikes Peak, the Ozarks, Washington, DC, Jackson Hole, Yosemite and the Gulf Coast Gator Ranch in Mississippi.



This last one kind of goes with the full size Crocodillian hanging on the wall. It was carved in Teak by a woodcarver in India. Do you think it's a crocodile or an alligator? Here are a few clues: crocodiles usually are light olive brown color, have pointed, V-shaped snouts and when their mouths are shut their upper and lower jaw teeth interlock so they look like they are flashing a toothy grin. Alligators are more black than green, have blunt, U-shaped snouts and their upper jaws are wider than their lower jaws so their teeth are hidden when their mouths are closed. Rounding out the gator theme are the long upholstered bench seats called Banquettes covered in a faux alligator material.

The bar is well managed which is not surprising since Joe is also the owner of Gin Rickeys in Dubuque. All beer is bottled and the signature Mason Dixon Bloody Marys are served in special Mason Dixon jars.

Appetizers are a good way to start either lunch or dinner at Mason Dixon Saloon. The Dixon Dice are addictive. Breaded pepper jack cheese cubes are served with a choice of dipping sauces. Mason's Motzys are mozzarella sticks breaded with Italian seasonings and are delicious with the special marinara sauce.



The breaded and fried Portobello mushrooms are a real treat. You know Portobellos are considered the steak of mushrooms. However, did you know when they are immature white mushrooms they are called Button or Common and when they are immature brown they are referred to as Cremini, Crimini, Chestnut or Baby Bellas? I didn't know all these names refer to the same mushroom!



Without a doubt the must-have Starter is a basket of fabulous Mason Dixon Chicken Wings. Ten jumbo wings are coated with an enticing seasoning and then fried in such a way there is no trace of oil or grease. They are scrumptious just the way they are served and sauces are unnecessary. But if you insist on saucing your wings there are 3 homemade dips on the menu. They are Buffalo, Sweet BBQ and Crazy Hot. You can request a fourth sauce called Insanely Hot. Only crazy people order this sauce because it's made with Ghost Pepper and is a mouth burner. The Crazy Hot Sauce packs a great deal of flavor and the Insanely Hot Sauce is mostly heat. By the way, the Ghost Pepper also known as Bhut Jolokia has a rating of 1,041,427 Scoville Heat Units (SHU). At one time this was considered the hottest pepper but would you believe it is currently ranked number 9 on the Scoville Heat Scale? The 3rd hottest pepper is called the 7 Pot Brain Strain at 1,900,000 SHU. The second hottest is the Trinidad Scorpion Moruga Blend at 2,009,231 SHU and the current record holder is the Carolina Reaper coming in at a whopping 2,200,000 Scoville Heat Units! By comparison the ubiquitous Jalapeño ranges from 2,500 to 10,000 SHU; Original Tabasco Sauce is 2,500 to 5,000 SHU and a Peppercornini is hardly hot at all with a rating of only 100 to 500 units.

### Mason Dixon Saloon

163 Main Street, Dubuque, IA 52001, 563-582-3445  
www.MasonDixonSaloon.com

**HOURS:** Bar: 11 am – 2 am daily  
Kitchen: 11 am – 8:30 pm daily

**DINING STYLE:** Come as you are

**NOISE LEVEL:** Loud

**RECOMMENDATIONS:** Kickin' Chicken Wings, Dixon Dice, Portobello Mushrooms, Mason Burger, Reuben, Grilled Chicken Breast, BLT, Patty Melt, Pulled Pork Sandwich, Mason Dixon Ribs

**LIQUOR SERVICE:** Full Bar, all beer in bottles  
**PRICES:** \$6.25 - \$22.00

**PAYMENT OPTIONS:** Cash, Debit, Visa, MasterCard, Discover, AMEX, checks, ATM on premises

**ACCESSIBILITY:** Ramp to Front Door & Restrooms

**KIDS POLICY:** No Menu, No High Chair, No Boosters

**RESERVATIONS:** No **CATERING:** No

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



The burgers are one third pound Angus patties. The ground beef, steaks and ribs all come from Silker's Grocery Store in Epworth, Iowa where all meat is cut and ground daily. I particularly like the specially seasoned Mason Burger topped with bacon and pepper jack cheese.

The BLT has four thick slices of bacon, tomato and lettuce between slices of Texas Toast. The bacon is intentionally cooked to medium for extra flavor. So if you are one of those people who have to have burnt bacon strips you can ask for extra crispy. The Reuben is a goodly portion of corned beef sandwiched with a really tasty sauerkraut and Thousand Island dressing. The Grilled Chicken Breast has a wonderful seasoning and is accompanied by two tasty sides like baked beans or fresh, crispy coleslaw.



By far the most exceptional dinner is the Mason Dixon Ribs. Dennis is the Pitmaster and on Fridays and Sundays he uses his own special recipe dry-rub on Baby Back Pork Ribs. He slow cooks them for 3 hours over all natural hardwood lump charcoal. They are usually available from 4:30 pm to approximately 7:30 to 8:30 pm. Dennis will not serve warmed over ribs so he only cooks a limited number. They go fast so if you want them you must arrive early! These were voted Best Ribs in the Tri-State Area at Hospice of Dubuque's Best Fest 2013. Ribs can be ordered as a half rack of 5 ribs or full rack of 10. It has been my experience 5 ribs are more than enough since Dennis only buys Extra Meaty Baby Backs.



Leftover ribs are turned into pulled pork sandwiches or wraps. They are usually available on Saturdays and Mondays but only until they are all gone. This is why you see some foodies at Mason Dixon Friday nights and again on Saturdays.



Mason Dixon Saloon is available for private parties up to 95 people. Hats, shirts, tank-tops and sweatshirts can be purchased so you can enhance your wardrobe.

