



Watershed Café

by Rich Belmont



You can't judge a book by its cover. You can't judge a restaurant by how it looks either. Some friends of mine recently took a ride over to the Watershed Café located in the old A & W near the corner of 32nd Street and Central Avenue in Dubuque. They

said it still looked like a hot dog place so they didn't go in. Boy, what a mistake! Because this restaurant is now a tremendous burger, pizza and sandwich shop!

It is so named because the Bee Branch Watershed is right behind it. The interior has been remodeled and the new operator is passionate about his menu. In fact, you might already know him. Chef Mike Bries is a native Dubuque who started cooking when he was 13 years old. As soon as he was old enough he opened Breezer's Pub in Dubuque. He sold it in order to attend Scott Community College Culinary School in Bettendorf, Iowa. He returned to Dubuque to intern at the Grand Harbor Resort and Waterpark where he was promoted 3 times in one year to Prep Cook, Supervisor and Kitchen Manager. He then became the Culinary Manager at the Dubuque Olive Garden. Now after acquiring several years of cooking experience he was ready to run his own restaurant. Mike purchased the Athenian Grill and operated it for 4 years. During that time he also started Michael Paul's, a fine dining establishment on Asbury Road.



So as you might imagine Chef Mike is an accomplished and experienced restaurateur. Now he has opened Watershed Café, an unpretentious counter-service restaurant dedicated to an honest uncomplicated philosophy: To serve simply prepared foods that are delicious because only fresh and premium ingredients are used.

Some examples of this philosophy: Choice grade fresh, never frozen, ground beef is used in the burgers. Hash browns are made from fresh shredded potatoes. The Reuben contains fresh sauerkraut. Only fresh portabella mushrooms are used in the Mushroom and Swiss Burgers and on the pizzas. Hollandaise sauce, sausage gravy and BBQ sauce are prepared in the kitchen. The pizza dough and sauce are made from scratch as well.



You will discover the quality straight away when you start off with the appetizers. When you order the Jumbo Wings you get a full pound of large deep fried-to-crispy chicken wings with your choice of Buffalo, Honey BBQ or Asian Sesame sauce. Try some Pizza Nuggets, too (pictured below). Homemade pizza dough is cut up and deep fried then sprinkled with Parmesan Cheese and Kosher Salt.



The Burgers are all one-third pound fresh ground beef. You can do a custom burger with your choice of pickles, lettuce, tomatoes and onions or choose one of the specialty burgers. The Bacon Cheeseburger comes topped with Velveeta and three serious strips of bacon (at right). My favorite is the Green Olive Burger. A generous helping of sliced green olives are placed on the burger with cheese. The menu states the cheese is fresh grated mozzarella but I like to order it with Swiss cheese.

All of the burgers come with fries. Here is one of the ways Chef Bries demonstrates his expertise. He knows French Fries must have a crispy outer coating and the interior must remain intact, fluffy, and still have

a real potato flavor. To accomplish this he cuts fresh Idaho russet potatoes and then deep fries them twice. They are served with a special seasoning. However, I prefer to order them without the seasoning in order to get more of that pure crispy fresh potato flavor.



The sandwiches are all made with fresh ingredients. There are several to choose from so I will just mention the ones I like the best. The Philly Cheese Steak is made with in-house shaved and grilled Ribeye steak cooked when ordered and covered with onions and cheese wiz. The Reuben (below) is crafted from slow roasted Certified Angus Brisket. It is layered with homemade sauerkraut and topped with Swiss cheese and Thousand Island dressing and grilled on marble rye bread. Fresh Pork Tenderloin is hand cut and trimmed, pounded out and breaded only when you order the Pork Tenderloin sandwich (pictured below, with the chicken bacon sandwich to the right). I do believe this tender, juicy and flavorful Pork T is the best I have ever had!



Watershed Café

51 W. 32nd Street, Dubuque, IA 52001
563-690-2080 | facebook.com/WatershedCafe
HOURS: Mon -Thu, 11 a.m. - 7 p.m., Fri -Sat, 11 a.m. - 9 p.m., Sun, 12 p.m. - 7p.m., Sun Breakfast, 7:30 a.m. - Noon
DINING STYLE: Counter service, Come as you are
NOISE LEVEL: Conversational
RECOMMENDATIONS: Pizza Nuggets, Pizza, Bacon Cheeseburger, Olive Burger, Fried Chicken, Pork Tenderloin, Eggs Benedict
PRICES: \$5.95 - \$24.95 LIQUOR SERVICE: None
PAYMENT OPTIONS: Cash, Major Credit, No Checks
KIDS POLICY: Welcome, Menu items, High chairs
RESERVATIONS: Call ahead for large group seating
ACCESSIBILITY: Front door and restrooms
CATERING: Yes TAKE OUT: Yes
DELIVERY: Businesses with 1 day notice
PARKING: Lot in front



There are also a couple of dinner entrees on the menu. The chicken is hand battered and coated with a special blend of seasoning (see facing page). It's really good but you should know it's a little spicy. There are also St. Louis BBQ Ribs slow roasted and slathered with a traditional BBQ sauce made from a proprietary recipe.

Now I have some good news for all of you Foodies who miss the Athenian Grill's Super Colossal Sunday Breakfast! Watershed Café has brought back the entire breakfast menu for your Sunday morning enjoyment! The expertly prepared 3 egg omelets served with fresh shredded hash browns are there. So are the pancakes, French toast and waffles just



like you remembered. The Watershed Scramble (above) with ham, cream cheese and green onions is a delight. I particularly like the Biscuits smothered with homemade sausage gravy (below). My favorite breakfast, though, is definitely the Eggs Benedict. Two English muffin slices are each topped with really thick slices of Canadian bacon, perfectly poached eggs and an absolutely delicious homemade Hollandaise Sauce (left).



I have visited Watershed Café several times and I am impressed with the large number of regular customers this little restaurant has developed already. After all it's only been open about 4 months! I think I know why this is happening too. It's because of the Pizza! Chef Mike knows you can get a pie in a lot of different places around Dubuque, so he knew he needed something a little different. He started with a New York Style pizza and added his own creative touch to produce a new sensation. These pizzas are like New York pies in several ways. The crust is homemade and



stretched thin. Then it is covered with a made-from-scratch thin pizza sauce containing in-house crushed Roma tomatoes. Then a copious portion of fresh mozzarella cheese is added. Only fresh toppings including Portabella mushrooms, sausage, spinach, green peppers, etc. are used. Mike adds a braided crust painted with garlic butter which sort of gives you a pizza with built in garlic sticks. And like the New York pie the dinner version is a whopping 20 inches in diameter. (365'er Kristina is in the photo below to provide scale, even though she's kind of tiny). Reminds me of my mom's favorite song: When the moon hits your eye like a big pizza pie, that's amore!



When you visit Watershed Café do take the time to check out the photographs on all the walls. They are all scenes from Dubuque's North End taken between the 1900's and the 1960's. Mike wishes to thank Mike Gibson of the Loras College Archive Department for all his help with procuring the pictures. Mike also wants to express his gratitude to his partners, the Roger Kunde Family, for all their encouragement and support.