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Hoggin' It BBQ in Okauchee keeps the fires stoked



Restaurant owner Mike Sommers (pictured) recently opened Hoggin' It BBQ in downtown Okauchee. In addition to smoked pork, chicken and brisket, the restaurant offers Wisconsin made beers and sodas.

By Sheila Nero

Jan. 11, 2016

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At Hoggin' It BBQ in Okauchee Lake, it's all about the meat smoker, shaped from metal plate like thin armor and made to order in Alabama.

"She weighs about a ton and a half," said owner Mike Sommers. The dining room gets fringe benefits: warmth from the smoker just outside and the faint aroma of barbecue in progress.

"We serve Southern barbecue with a Northern flair," Sommers said. "In the North, customers prefer a smokier flavor so we use more smoking wood than they do in the South."

Sounding like a true Northerner, he says, "In any season, we're outside tending the fires." Sommers doesn't believe in using indoor pits or ovens to finish the meat.

The smoker, which has a compartmentalized design, simultaneously can handle 20 briskets, 30 to 35 pork shoulders, about 50 chickens and 45 to 50 full racks of ribs. "It's like a jigsaw puzzle to fit them together without touching," Sommers said.

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Inside the smoker, Sommers uses lump hardwood or hickory charcoal. He tops it with the smoking wood: hickory with chicken, mesquite with brisket and apple with pork shoulder and pork ribs. Before smoking the meat, he applies dry rubs of his own creation.

The menu

Open for lunch and dinner, Hoggin' It BBQ serves sandwiches and dinner platters of pork, chicken, ribs and brisket. Sides, which include mac and cheese and coleslaw, are prepared in a hearty country style. For instance, the baked beans hold meat tidbits; garlic mashed potatoes contain chunks of garlic and the German potato salad (his grandma's recipe) has full pieces of bacon rather than crumbled bits.

The most popular items? "It varies from week to week, but the pork and the brisket are our big hitters," he said. "A business core for us is the bulk carryout for families or events." Updated specials can be found on Facebook.

Liquid smoke, a byproduct of smoking meats, is used in Sommers' barbecue sauce, for sale by the bottle. "The liquid smoke has a certain complex flavor from the mixture of meats in the smoker," he said.

His business philosophy is to support small businesses like his, both in the area and in the state. This shows in his beer and soda list, which is Wisconsin-only.

The background

A resident of Watertown, Sommers handpicked a crew of five Watertown employees for his restaurant. His father, who has a place in Okauchee, suggested the Lake Country location.

Sommers gained restaurant experience from age 15 onward. His passion for food overtook his degree in sociology and criminal justice from the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater. During college, he often was elected to cook for a group of hearty eaters. After college, he sampled Costa Rican cuisine, living there for about a year and a half. Sommers, who is also a pastry chef, studied at the Cooking and Hospitality Institute of Chicago.

The tables

Customers can expect food served picnic-style, with plastic serving baskets and lots of paper napkins. Dress is casual and the atmosphere is relaxed.

Customers can choose seats at the tile-top counter at the entrance, tables off to the side, or booths in the dining room.

Restaurant Scout profiles Lake Country restaurants to describe ambience, cuisine, price range and clientele. This is a destination feature rather than a food review. Send questions or comments to restaurantscout@gmail.com.

Good to know

WEBSITE:www.hogginitbbqllc.com

ADDRESS:N50 W34959 Wisconsin Ave., Okauchee

PHONE:(262) 468-4154

FARE:Southern barbecue with a Northern flair

RESERVATIONS: Walk-ins welcome

PRICE RANGE:\$8.50 for a pulled pork sandwich with two sides to \$20 for a full rack of ribs

HOURS: Closed Tuesdays. Open 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Sunday, and 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. Friday and Saturday

WHEELCHAIR ACCESS: Yes

KIDS MENU AND HIGH CHAIRS: Yes

GLUTEN-FREE OPTIONS:Yes

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Weekend Happenings

Featured this week:

Knights of Columbus Fish Fry: 4:30 p.m. Jan. 15, St. Jerome Catholic Church, 995 S. Silver Lake St., Oconomowoc. Includes baked and fried cod with French fries, German and American potato salad, coleslaw, rye bread, grilled cheese sandwiches, four-bean salad, and coffee and milk. Soda, beer and desserts are available for an additional cost. Carryouts available. Call 569-3032 from 4:30 p.m. to 7 p.m. \$9 for all-you-can-eat for adults and \$5 for children.

Winter Farmers Market: 9:30 a.m.-1 p.m. Jan. 17, Oconomowoc Landscape Supply & Garden Center, County Road K, Oconomowoc. Market features local seasonally grown produce, artisan food products and handmade products.

Electri-Violet: 7 p.m. Jan. 15-16, Oconomowoc Arts Center, 641 E. Forest St., Oconomowoc. Vocalist Carole Ferrara and guitarist John Plankenhorn are joined by three band members bringing beautiful R&B/jazz-inspired music with soulful, stunning vocals, harmonies and instrumentation. Show tickets: \$28 adults, \$15 students. Dinner Tickets: \$40 Adults, \$25 students.

PK Harmony: 11 a.m.-1 p.m. Jan. 16, Mama D's Coffee Shop, 104 W. Main St., Wales. Eclectic range of folk revival, jug band and American Songbook music.

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Monday, January 18, 2016