

"America's best ribs" are at Michelbob's

By Lance Shearer Jan. 09, 2009

Some people travel a great distance to enjoy a great meal. Some only have to step across the street. But, for others, it's a combination of the two.

Such is the case with William Sprowls, Jr., a pilot for FlexJet, who has a restaurant in every city, the way sailors are said to have a girl in every port.

"Name a town," he says, "and I'll tell you the food we go for." In Chicago, it's deep dish pizza. In California, it's In and Out Burgers. In Detroit, it's Lebanese. In Boston, it's lobster. And here, it's baby back ribs at Michelbob's.

Fellow pilot Pedro Lazuriaga said the real reason they came to Michelbob's for lunch is that he agreed to buy. But, he stressed that their souvenir cups were filled with nothing stronger than root beer.

Sprowls and Lazuriaga aren't the only ones who know about Michelbob's. People all over are familiar with their baby back ribs, thanks in part to a string of awards for the best ribs and best sauce in competitions all over the U.S. and Canada.

Decades ago, co-owners Marsha Gibbs and Bob Mattson made a conscious decision to key the marketing of their restaurant to winning awards and spent many summers following what Gibbs called the "rib tour."

Now, the giant red letters over the building in Naples don't say "Michelbob's" but rather "Best Ribs in America."

This year marks the 30-year anniversary for the rib house that has become a Naples institution. Michelbob's started out as a Fat Boy's and remained that way for less than a year, and then was briefly called Jim Bob's. Sometime later, the name changed again; the Michelbob's name, says Marsha Gibbs, was a play on Michelob beer.

"Ribs built this business," says Gibbs, but in the beginning they were spareribs. Now, the only ribs served at Michelbob's are baby backs from Denmark. The tangy mustard-based sauce is the original recipe and is accompanied by a brown sugar-based, sweet barbecue sauce that the partners added to accommodate the area's older population. It is now their most popular sauce.

Ribs are still the restaurant's signature dish, but there is more to Michelbob's than ribs. As Americans has moved to prefer a lighter, healthier fare, Mattson and Gibbs have adapted their menu. They added several salad plates and offer smaller portions. But this is not the place to come with your Weight Watchers group. Even the souvenir T-shirts proclaim, "I pigged out at Michelbob's."

Other popular menu items include steaks, hamburgers, fried catfish, BBQ chicken and sliced, not pulled, pork. Desserts include vanilla ice cream, brownie sundae and key lime pie; the menu boasts "over 200,000 slices sold!!"

Asked to give a reason for Michelbob's continued popularity, Gibbs stressed quality and consistency. "All our food is cooked here from scratch every day - nothing frozen. We give good food at a good value."

She also pointed out that most of the restaurant's approximately 25 employees have worked there for 10 years or longer. One server has been with them for 23 years. Gibbs herself is there every day, regularly putting in 12 to 14 hours at the Naples location.

One question she can't answer is, "Why a BBQ restaurant?" Gibbs credits her partner, Mattson, who handles marketing and promotion for Michelbob's, with the idea. Since then, she says, they have learned by trial and error, listened to their customers and provided them what they want. Now, they serve 400,000 racks of ribs a year, along with 20,000 gallons of beer and 100,000 chickens. Each week, the restaurant goes through 450 gallons of BBQ sauce, and on one recent Monday, more than 400 rib dinners.

Owning the real estate has made a significant contribution to the restaurant's profitability over the years. After the owners retired from the "rib tour" competition circuit, they bought a fishing lodge in Canada, which has been since sold, and focused their summer efforts there. Posters and photos of trophy fish still line the walls, although the dominant decorating note is supplied by the countless Coca-Cola signs which are everywhere at Michelbob's.

They also cater, and have handled parties up to 3,000 with their off-site cooker. They ship ribs overnight all over the country, which Gibbs recommends as an unusual gift. Takeout business is strong and Michelbob's has operated a second, takeout-only location on Marco Island for 15 years.

James Henderson was one takeout customer taking advantage of the convenience. He walked over from the Saturn dealer next door, where he works, to pick up his chicken sandwich.

"Frankly, it's too convenient," he said. "This is a great place to eat. They're so nice, I feel guilty." _____

Michelbob's advertises this fishing lodge in Ontario, Canada as Bob Mattson was its prior owner.



In 1979, Minnesotan Bob Mattson and Floridian Marsha Gibbs collaborated to create Michelbob's Championship Ribs Restaurant in Naples, Florida and later, their take-out sister-establishment on Marco Island.

From the beginning, their goal was clear. Offer guests the best possible dining experience with delicious, "made-from-scratch" original-recipe food for a reasonable price, in a friendly, casual smoke-free family atmosphere.

Michelbob's variety is broad enough to suit all tastes; meats, chicken, salads, some fish, homemade onion rings, baked beans and cole slaw, as well as a special kids' menu and cocktails. But their signature dish has always been tender, slow-smoked, mouth-watering Barbeque Baby Back Ribs imported from Denmark. Take-out is available and ribs can be shipped anywhere in America.

Now a Naples landmark, the restaurant's cozy rustic decor is enhanced by all manner of memorabilia, most prominently from Coca Cola, plus whimsical signs, photos of some of their favorite sports like Canadian freshwater fishing and Masters Golf, and of course, many Ribs and BBQ Sauce Championship trophies and awards won over the years.

Very much a meticulously family-run establishment, Marsha, Bob, Bob's mom Shirley, as well as Marsha's sons Brian and Brad have been the faces of the businesses in both Naples and Marco Island from the very beginning.

In early 2014, when Marsha retired, Jennifer Mattson and Lou Bavaro, Bob's daughter and son-in-law, moved their family from Minnesota to Naples to co-own Michelbob's with Bob and take over the day-to-day management of the restaurants.

Already deeply involved in the business, Jen and Lou have worked tirelessly since 2005, developing and promoting West River Meats, Michelbob's own USDA plant in Colorado, which produces their pre-cooked Heat & Eat Baby Back Ribs for retail sales. Their aggressive demo programs for Michelbob's BBQ Ribs, Bratwurst, Sausages, Bacon, BBQ Sauces and Seasonings have successfully introduced their products to new customers and established partnerships with food service and retail grocery industries across the country from the Southeast to the Pacific Northwest.

Now, during most any visit to Michelbob's in Naples, you will find Lou smiling at the door greeting guests, working the register, answering the phone, assisting the servers, checking the kitchen, and doing whatever needs to be done to keep things running smoothly.

Or maybe just talking football or basketball!

If you can't make it to Florida in the near future, we ship ribs and sauce anywhere in America! For more information, check our shipping page: [Michelbob's Ships Ribs!](#)



North of Cochrane, amid a sprawling and unspoiled wilderness, lies incredible Kesagami Lake – Ontario's premier trophy northern pike lake. Shallow (averaging 7 feet), stained and rimmed with weedy bays, Kesagami is home to an inestimable number of pike over 40 inches (20 lb) and world-class fish measuring 50 inches (30 lb). Conservative size/possession regulations and a strong live-release awards program are in place, maintaining an exciting trophy fishery for the future. Additionally, Kesagami Lake offers exceptional walleye fishing where rocky shoals, islands and points always hold numbers of fish in the 1 to 4-pound class.

Built in the mid '80's, the fly-in "American Plan" lodge is welcoming and luxurious beyond expectation. Handsomely appointed rooms and rustic cabins, a spacious recreation area / lounge with massive fireplace and stained glass windows offer guests relaxing moments and social activities when they are not fishing.

At Kesagami, boats are huge, stable, square-back Scott canoes with plenty of room for anglers, their gear, shore lunch box and camera equipment. Guides are available through the outfitter and a hearty shore lunch built around just-caught golden walleye fillets should be part of any trip here. Kesagami Wilderness Lodge welcomes individuals (no "double occupancy" surcharge), families, physically and/or developmentally challenged persons. The lodge staff will enthusiastically prepare for and attend to the special needs of anglers and guests to insure a memorable visit to Kesagami.

The Kesagami wilderness teems with wildlife including wolves, bear, lynx, otter, beaver, fox, marten, fisher and eagles, but the "must-see" here are the woodland caribou which inhabit the area and roam throughout the region. Canoeing, back-lakes fishing and wildlife photography opportunities abound. Remote and unspoiled, Kesagami is unquestionably Ontario's premier fly-in fishing lodge.

Kesagami



This is THE fly in fishing destination to visit if you are looking for a fantastic wilderness fishing experience for trophy northern pike and walleye. At Kesagami we pride

My 20 years of experience guiding and managing at Kesagami gives me lots to talk about ...

Call me for more information & references (800) 253-3474... Charlie