

Caroline's Restaurant in the Hotel Julien Dubuque

Posted by By Rich Belmont on 6/23/2011

It is not for nothing the writers of Martha Stewart Weddings selected Hotel Julien Dubuque as the Number One reception venue in Iowa in the magazine's 2010 travel issue. After all, over the last four years the Pfohl Family has invested over 32 million dollars restoring Dubuque's majestic Hotel Julien Dubuque to its former glory.

And that includes renovating and modernizing the kitchen of Caroline's Restaurant and staffing it with talented and experienced management. All necessary since the restaurant stands ready to serve hotel guests morning, noon and night. Moreover, it is prepared to provide room service and cater several banquets at the same time. The hotel has nine banquet rooms including the Grande Ballroom, Fleur de Lis, River Room and Harbor Gallery. The chef and culinary staff have accumulated more than a little experience in creating dazzling gourmet dinners for as many as 600 guests at once! Imagine what they can do when they have the time to prepare your lunch or dinner.

Caroline's is totally dedicated to providing casual, yet elegant meals in a beautiful setting befitting a first class hotel and spa. The restaurant is named in honor of Caroline (Rhomberg) Fischer. Caroline's husband, Louis, was a partner in the Fischer Ice business. In 1875 he fell into the Mississippi River while cutting ice, contracted pneumonia and subsequently died. Suddenly, young Caroline, who was 31 at the time and the mother of 5 young children found herself operating a business. She worked hard and sacrificed much eventually buying out Louis's partners while investing in downtown Dubuque and riverfront property. The Fischer/Pfohl family owns and maintains these properties to this day.

With so much invested a professional hospitality management company was brought in to run the hotel and restaurant. Inn Development and Management, known as IDM Group LLC, is responsible for day-to-day operations. It was incumbent upon them to staff Caroline's with capable and well-trained people.

Dave Linhart (left), Food and Beverage Manager, for example, started working banquets at Jumer's in Illinois when he was 16 and has now been in food service for over 23 years. Drew Weis (right), the Executive Chef, is a 2006 graduate of Le Cordon Bleu College of Culinary Arts in Mendota Heights, MN. Drew was previously a chef at Eagle Ridge Resort, Bittersweet on the Bluff and Woodfire Grill before accepting the Top Chef position at Hotel Julien Dubuque. There are many other experienced staffers including Sous Chef, Jeremy Culbertson; Floor Manager, Carol Freihage and Bar Manager, Brian Hoffman.



Caroline's opens for breakfast at 6:00 am on week days and 7:00 am on week-ends. In addition to the usual fruit bowl, oatmeal, muffins and eggs with bacon or sausage there are some interesting specialties. The Banana Bread French Toast starts with fresh from the oven banana bread dipped in a blend of secret ingredients, cinnamon, vanilla and egg and is topped with Amaretto caramelized bananas. The Main Street Platter is definitely for the hungry man. Four buttermilk biscuits are smothered in sausage gravy, topped with two eggs cooked to your order and served with a heaping pile of hash browns. You can kick this one up by skipping the special cheddar cheese sauce and asking for melted pepper jack cheese instead. My favorite breakfast is the Eggs Benedict Florentine. Poached eggs and Canadian bacon on muffins covered with a smooth white Florentine sauce blended with spinach, cream cheese, a little white wine and Fontina and Parmesan cheeses.

Are you looking for a good place to go for lunch? I love the Spicy White Bean and Chicken Chili. Tomatoes and roasted red peppers are cooked and the pulp is discarded. Then they are added to a white chicken chili along with special seasonings, heavy whipping cream, northern white beans, a little hot sauce and cilantro. This chili is a delight even in the summer! The Stuffed Julien Burger is an exciting burger choice. A 10 ounce ground sirloin patty is filled with melted pepper jack cheese, covered with a spicy mayonnaise and served on a ciabatta hoagie. If you want to stay meatless the Vegetarian Po Boy is a great way to do so. Cooked peppers and mushrooms are sandwiched in with sliced tomatoes and cucumbers and set off by a garlic basil mayo and provolone cheese. If you are in

the mood for light summer fare you might try the Shrimp and Avocado Salad. Bite sized shrimp, guacamole, tomatoes, limes are mixed with fresh field greens and tossed with light vinaigrette made from mayo, Feta cheese, white wine vinegar, lemon juice, basil and oregano.

Because Caroline's is the dining room for a luxurious boutique hotel the waitstaff is quite knowledgeable in accommodating special requests. During a recent tasting and photo taking session our server, Dawn Livingston, was extremely helpful and demonstrated a surprising knowledge of the menu. With her assistance my guests and I enjoyed a wonderful evening of entertainment as we dined on some of Chef Weis's delicious creations. For starters we had the Olive Medley: jumbo green olives stuffed with garlic or jalapeno or bleu cheese on fresh baked toasted baguette. The Stuffed Mushroom was unusually good. A really big portabella crown is stuffed with carefully wilted spinach, garlic herb cream cheese, roasted red peppers and bacon. The Catfish Cakes were scrumptious too. Fresh Mississippi River catfish are combined with a Rémoulade. This is a French sauce made from garlic mayonnaise, pickle relish, capers, and lemon juice mixed with a lemon honey beurre blanc.



Then there was my favorite appetizer: the Artichoke Fritters. If you love artichokes like I do you too will love these critters. Chopped artichoke hearts are blended with cream cheese, parmesan and cheddar cheese. Then the mix is rolled into balls and coated with egg and seasoned bread crumbs and deep fried. They are served with a spicy aioli consisting of mayonnaise, garlic, chive and a touch of hot sauce.

Our dinner continues as a journey through gustatory wonderland. For us meat lovers – it is good to know all the beef is Choice Grade, Certified Black Angus. The London Broil is a Flank Steak marinated for 1 to 2 days in a mixture of soy sauce, ketchup, rice wine vinegar and honey. The most popular is the Rib Eye covered with Bourbon Sauce, a concoction of roasted red peppers, onions, mushrooms and Cajun spices sautéed in garlic butter. My favorite is the Rib Eye topped with a crust of Buttermilk Blue Cheese, Panko bread crumbs and butter.

Some of the house specialties are awesome. The Herb Roasted Chicken is a plate of semi boneless chicken served with an unusual Marsala sauce that is light and creamy and not at all like you would expect in a veal Marsala. Instead this sauce is a Bechamel made from sautéed mushrooms, garlic, shallots, heavy cream and a Marsala wine reduction.



The Chicken Cordon Bleu Florentine is a popular chicken entrée. The Chef makes a pocket in a trimmed chicken breast and stuffs it with fresh spinach, baby Swiss cheese and deli ham. Then he covers it with Panko bread crumbs and bakes until toasted.

I thoroughly enjoyed the BBQ Baby Back Ribs (pictured above). These are thick cut and meaty Karubi ribs. First they are dry rubbed, then placed in a marinade of root beer, vegetable stock and Mirepoix. They are braised for 8 to 10 hours, patted dry and covered with a homemade Ancho Chile BBQ sauce.



My wife enjoyed the Grilled Salmon immensely. A large salmon filet is quickly seared then sprinkled with house seasonings and oven baked. Just before serving it is covered with a sauce reduction of honey, lemon juice, ginger and soy.

I have two suggestions for those who crave unusual tastes. The Duck Mansur is a duck breast seasoned, scored and pan seared. Then it is slow roasted in a Chambord sauce. This French liquor is mixed with a purée of raspberries, blueberries, blackberries and strawberries and veal stock demi-glace. I also recommend the Lobster Mac N Cheese Bake. Shrimp and Langoustine Lobster meat is mixed into an excellent Mornay sauce of cream cheese, Fontina, four year old sharp cheddar cheese, fresh spinach and egg shell pasta and baked until golden brown.

Now I know this is tough, but you really do need to save room for dessert. The Strawberry Short Cake is the house specialty. The Fresh berries and chocolate cakes should also be called specialties. They are all worthy of the designation.

Before you leave you should take a few minutes to look around the dining room. The décor is pleasing and the stained glass windows are quite beautiful. Check out the charger plates decorating the walls. These are decorative

plates used to adorn the tables in some of the most elegant fine dining restaurants from around the world. The Pfohl family procured these as mementoes of their travels and we are fortunate to have their valuable collection on display here in Dubuque. You will see plates from many famous places including Maxims, Paris; Palace Hotel, Lucerne; Eagles Nest, Hong Kong; Aruba Caribbean, Aruba; Antoine's, New Orleans; Waldorf-Astoria, New York City; Escoffier, Beverly Hills; Fontainebleau, Miami Beach; and Hotel Tropicana, Las Vegas.