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THE ENQUIRER

For ribs and more, Goodie's is great

Slow-cooked food follows Southern style

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Nobody ever asks what's good at Goodie's.

Walk in, inhale the aroma, sit down and order ribs. Some people look at the menu first, but most don't. This is a ribs joint and everyone knows it.

"They aren't the best cut of meat, but if you prepare them with enough love, they're delicious, and our regulars know that," says owner Creola Robinson, a 39-year-old Springfield Township resident, married mother of two and, most recently, UC student.

"We only seat 30 in the dining room, but we still go through 3,500 pounds of meat a week. I think that's because of consistency. Everything here has tasted the same for 20 years."

Thank the College Hill restaurant's founder for that. Robinson's father, Bill "Goodie" Dickerson, opened Goodie's Southern Style Barbecue in 1986.

"He's not a trained chef or anything like that," Robinson said. "He's a guy who just loves to cook."

Dickerson, 66, of Forest Park, was working for General Foods in the Napa Valley area when he was transferred here in 1985. Within months, his entire division was eliminated, and he was looking for something to do. A restaurant seemed logical.

He opened in a small storefront one block south of the current Hamilton Avenue (5841) location. It didn't take long for a move to larger quarters, to a cheery storefront opening onto a deep green and off-white room full of green 4-tops.

Robinson was working as a financial planner in 2000 and didn't much like it. So she bought Goodie's from her dad and made some changes in the operations and business side, leaving the product untouched.

She left the 10-member staff alone, too. Her dad still works there. So does mom Myrtle one day a week. Brother Anthony Dickerson is in the kitchen. And 15-year-old nephew Robert Callery just started, doing whatever needs to be done.

Keeping the menu and staff intact was a wise move. Business was good when she bought it, and it's even better now.

"It's been just crazy here the past couple of months. I just bought a second grill to keep up with demand."

Part of the increased demand might be because of the Food Network's "The Best Of," a foodie travelogue in which Marc Silverstein and Jill Cordes criss-cross the country in search of fabulous food.

"They came in and shot me, my dad and some of the diners. The show ran last month, and our segment lasted more than five minutes. That just made us busier."

Another boost for business came a few years ago when Robinson added a drive-through window.

The dinner that people grab on the drive home from work is usually ribs or rib tips (the top third of the rib) because, as Robinson says, Goodie's ribs are nothing like the others sold around town.

"We're different because our ribs are traditional," says Robinson. "I've researched Southern cooking a great deal and found that it goes back to the days of slavery. Back then, slaves were given the worst cuts of meat and told to make do. That's what we still do here."

That means, as any good Southerner will tell you, that the ribs can't be tough but do need to be chewy. And they should never, ever, fall off the bone.

Goodie's ribs are treated with an eight-spice rub before they go out to the backyard and into the combo grill/smoker. Sauce isn't added until the ribs are plated.

// the sauce even goes on.

"You wouldn't believe how many people order it on the side. One thing we're really serious about is that nothing hides the taste of the meat. Our flavor goes in through the rubbing and cooking process. The sauce is just a condiment."

Yeah, but it's a famous condiment, now found on Kroger shelves regionally and soon to go national. Robinson already has a formal business plan mapped out.

That's one of the reasons she went back to school. The University of California at Davis graduate (English lit) is enrolled in a joint UC and Cincinnati State program that will train her as a chef *and* earn her a bachelor's degree in food science.

"I figure if I'm going to be in the business, I should learn everything I can and do it right."

She's serious about the "business" angle. After months of negotiations, Goodie's landed a contract with Cinergy Center to sell barbecue nachos.

"It's basic nacho chips with two scoops of our pulled pork. They've gone over so well we're probably going to sell them at Taste (of Cincinnati) this year."

Topping the nachos with pulled pork was another wise move: It's Goodie's second biggest seller.

"We cook it until it falls off the bone, then shred it a little more and top it with sauce. The brisket is another big seller."

If there's a common complaint with Goodie's, it's too much food. Entrées are enormous and leave little room for sides and desserts.

The mac and cheese, baked with three cheeses, is famous among regulars. The collard greens, made with a turkey base and sloooooow cooked, are every bit as famous, as are the fried okra and peach cobbler.

Then there's the potato salad.

"My dad still makes it a couple times a week. Nobody knows the recipe and nobody's allowed to touch it but him. It's a mayo base, I know that, with eggs, relish, pimentos and I don't know what else. The problem is we always sell out before he can get more made.

"That's a compliment to him, of course, but we just hate having to tell a customer we're out again."

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