

Restaurant Review 21 Charlotte's Rib December 11, 2014

RESTAURANT REVIEW: CHARLOTTE'S RIB: For younger readers, Charlotte Peters was the Ethel Mermen of St. Louis for over 20 years. (Now you will have to google "Ethel Mermen") She had an hour long TV variety show at noon that featured folks like Stan Kahn and Phyllis Diller not to mention nationally known people who had shows in town. She raised her family first in South St. Louis and later moved to Webster Groves where she lived in a modern house surrounded by stately homes on a hilly street that ran from S. Rock Hill Road to Lockwood Ave. Her son, CBC grad Mike Peters, is the liberal Pulitzer Prize winning editorial cartoonist who lives in Dayton, Ohio and also produces the daily cartoon strip "Mother Goose and Grimm."



KSD Publicity photo



Stan Kahn, Charlotte and announcer George Abel in a skit.



After her TV days were over Charlotte lent her name to her daughter Lisa and son-in-law Herb Schwarz who opened Charlotte's Rib BBQ. It was first located in Kirkwood on Big Bend just west of Kirkwood Road, where they did mostly a takeout business from a place with three small tables. That restaurant was closed in 1979 after an armed robbery where two suspects from the nearby Meacham Park neighborhood pistol whipped an employee. The restaurant reopened on Manchester Road in Ballwin. It later moved to the shopping center on the northwest corner of Clayton Road and Kehrs Mill Road where it has been for a long time.



When I moved back to St. Louis in 2006 Charlotte's Rib had something unique. The Parkmoor had been closed since 1999 after a 70-year run on the corner of Clayton Road and Big Bend Blvd. and replaced by a Walgreens. Besides breakfast all day, The Parkmoor was also a drive-in with a classic burger called "The King" and even better onion rings. People who had moved from St. Louis would stop at The Parkmoor for the Onion Rings when they were back in town.

It turns out that Charlotte's Rib makes "Parkmoor" Onion Rings. Founder Herb Schwarz used to run the Town Tavern located across the street from The Parkmoor and next to the Esquire Theater. He often hired people from The Parkmoor including a cook who brought along the recipe for the O-Rings, which was later moved to Charlotte's Rib.

So the Onion Rings brought me to Charlotte's Ribs...but the brisket sandwich and homemade potato salad makes me a regular customer. If I'm with my wife we will split a basket of onion rings. If I am by myself I'll order the brisket sandwich and pay an up-charge to get a side of O-rings. A full basket of rings is \$4.79 and the half-order is \$2.50.

The brisket is sliced, is always tender and is served with just a hint of sauce. The sandwich goes for \$7.49.



The potato salad is homemade. If you show up too early on a Tuesday often the potato salad has not been made yet. When they are out, there is no going to another container. More will be made tomorrow. What I now do is take a pint of the potato salad home.

A couple of weeks after my last solo lunch in November, I met former Chesterfield Patch editor Jean Whitney there for lunch. The interior of the restaurant has the charm of a locally owned eatery where the food and reasonable prices are more important than the decor. The furniture is old and the wall coverings take you back to another era.



The only request I made was that we try stuff we normally did not order. We ordered things we could split. First there was the half order of baby back ribs with sides (\$11.99 or \$13.99 with two sides.) Next we ordered a house specialty "The Noll Burger with Cheese" and a side (\$6.99). Our sides were the homemade bake beans, fries and homemade cole slaw.

The ribs were fine. I am a bad person to judge ribs because the standard is for the meat to be tender, but has to be cut off the bone. I like after it has been in a crock pot for eight hours and then into the oven to roast. The meat falls off the bone. This gets you points off at a BBQ competition. Charlotte's Rib wins a lot of regional BBQ contests.

My other problem with ribs is they are a lot of work and are mess. When we lived in Maryland to have a Chesapeake Bay crab dinner it was like golf. It was a social event. You spend three hours with friends, many drinking beer, cracking crabs and removing very small amounts of crab meat and telling stories. At the end of dinner you need to wash your hands for 10 minutes and your clothes reek of Old Bay seasoning and you

are thinking about stopping by a fast food joint for some food. Sometimes I relate the mess of eating ribs to Maryland crabs.

With ribs I spend more than on a steak and I'm not as full. My fingers are stuck together coated in BBQ sauce and surely there is some on my sweater or on my pants. After saying all of this...the Charlotte's ribs were fine. The bake beans clearly did not come from a can. I have to admit I would give the baked beans at Miller's Crossing a nod.



The Noll Burger was a treat. It was two very thin patties that were more in an oval shape to fit on a long bun. It was like the hamburger meat and cheese were all mushed together. Our favorite item after two trips to Miller's Crossing was the cheeseburger. This burger reminded us of Miller's Crossing but it may have been just a bit better.

The fries are big and filling. However there is a warning about the fries. They have not been sitting around, they come to you right out of the fryer and you are advised to leave them alone for a few minutes because they are HOT!



Maybe the biggest surprise for lunch was the cole slaw. When it arrived it was not creamy. In fact it looked like it would have a vinegar taste. However it did not. We were told that once the cole slaw is made, it is placed in a covered bucket it sits for 24 hours in the refrigerator.

"After I had my last fork full of the slaw, it was so good, I put my fork back into the empty bowl hoping there was some more," said Jean.

