

Ohio

Carefully Prepared Taste is on the Menu at Werner's Pork House

By Lisa Hooker

Don't look for a sign advertising Werner's Pork House along Interstate 71 in Wilmington. "We don't advertise along the highway. Local people just know we're here and travelers find us," says Owner Rich Werner. No doubt they spotted the big, pink pig on the sign outside of the restaurant. "We specialize in pork, and everything else on the menu we do better. Our steak is the best money can buy. Our chicken and seafood are prepared correctly. I don't believe that if you can't or choose not to eat pork that you should have to settle for second best when you order off our menu," says Werner.

The hand-cut, marinated and grilled butterfly loin is the best seller. The Werners prepared 28 tons of it in 2002. Another favorite menu item is the slow roasted and seasoned prime pork loin. Loin back ribs are served, because it is a meatier cut. The ribs are steamed, shocked and baked. "When meat is shocked, it goes from a hot place to a cold place immediately. That pulls any tough meat away from the bone and makes it very tender," he says.

Werner's has one base barbeque sauce, but dry seasonings are varied for each menu item. An outdoor smoker behind the restaurant can cook up to 850 pounds of pork at one time.

Other meats are prepared in the kitchen,

depending on the cut. The restaurant's meat is delivered twice a week, ordered directly from the packer. "Sometimes it's within two days of the oink," says Werner.

Werner and his wife, Barb, are partners in the business, which the two established in 1991. Previously Werner worked in the pork industry doing considerable pork promotion. He put this experience and know-how to work in the concession business as a way to put his daughter, Marsha, through college, then a catering business began in 1992. The restaurant opened in 1998.

"It was a whole learning process not just for us, but for her, too, because she worked right along with us," says Werner. The strategy was successful. Marsha graduated from Wilmington College and now she and her husband, Johnathon Arnold, work there too.

The company moved into its current location to accommodate its growth. "I had to reclaim my house and was just going to use this for storage and a certified catering kitchen away from home. The next thing you know we're opening a restaurant," Werner says.

Despite the location off the interstate, Werner says his business is built on repeat customers, not one-time visitors. "It truly amazes me how far people will drive for an evening meal. We can't put a dollar amount



on that," says Werner of his regular customers, who travel from Cleveland, Dayton, and points beyond.

"We add another ingredient to our recipes: love. That's why we make that extra effort and take the extra time. It's why it takes us four to five hours to make one batch or 18 slabs of ribs. It's why we make all of the desserts from scratch," says Werner.

Even with the restaurant, Werner's still does concessions for two fairs, 12 festivals each year and many off-site catering events.

In January 2003, the Werners opened their second location in Wilmington. Werner's Banquet and Specialty Center serves liquor, offers more upscale deli and appetizer menu items and can seat groups of up to 200 people. X

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