

## THIS WEEK'S FOOD REVIEW

### Barbecue Bonanza

#### LT's Grill

2305 Nott St. (St. James Square), Niskayuna, 372-8610. Serving Mon 11-2, Tue-Sat 11-9. AE, D, MC, V.

**Cuisine:** *barbecue*

**Entrée price range:** \$7 (portobello sandwich) to \$20 (full rack of ribs)

**Ambiance:** *Niskayuna rustic*

#### By B. A. Nilsson

Barbecue is enjoying an efflorescence the like of which I only dreamed of not too many years ago. Dinosaur Bar-B-Q entrenched itself Syracuse, branched into Rochester, then skipped Albany en route to a branch in Manhattan. Meanwhile, we contented ourselves with Northern-style grilled chicken and ribs, which can be excellent if that's what you've got your mouth set for.

But the Southern style, which puts the meat over wood smoke for many, many hours, is the unmistakable, falling-off-the-bone stuff. There's nothing like pulling it out of the fire and digging right in, but the better restaurants are the next best thing. One of the newest is LT's Grill, tucked into a corner of St. James Square in Niskayuna, the brainchild of two childhood friends who grew up in that neighborhood.

L.J. Goldstock and Tom Coppola bring not only a 30-year friendship but also a variety of talents to the eatery. Coppola is, among other occupations, a metal fabricator who turns out custom smokers. Goldstock is a chef who restlessly experiments with the recipes he likes, tuning them for his customers.

"I don't put as much smoke in the meat as they do down South," he tells me, parrying my only criticism of the place. "What we've got now is what people seem to like the best. And let me ask you this: When you got your order of ribs, were they falling off the bone?"

They were.

"Were they good?"

They were undoubtedly good. I ate them dry—they're seasoned with a tangy dry rub before they go over the heat—and I tried them with the barbecue sauce that Goldstock makes. Either way, they're delicious, but there's an extra oomph to the sauce that soon had me sampling it with everybody else's items.

The pig in me wanted to get a full rack of those ribs, but the choice of a half-rack (\$10, half the price), put plenty of meat in front of me. It was served with a slice of sweet homemade cornbread and a choice of two side dishes. I ordered the baked beans (done as I like them, with more of a molasses kick than the canned stuff offers) and coleslaw, which had the sweetness and crunch that naturally complements a barbecued dinner.

The place is easy enough to find—it's just off Balltown Road—and the inside has been thoroughly done over by its new owners. "People like booths as well as tables, so we put in both," Goldstock explained. "Some people like to eat at the bar, so we have a big bar with chairs. And we're putting in a salad bar," which should be in place by the time you read this.

With two of my dining party of three in place early, we ordered an appetizer to complement our beverages. (Sodas, that is, which shouldn't be classified as foodstuffs but to which I'm embarrassingly addicted.)

A \$9 plate of a dozen wings can be ordered hot or mild, or with a dry rub. Lily and I ordered them hot—we can do this when her mom isn't around to complain—and marveled at the crunch. (And they're not all that spicy, at least according to my overheated standards.)

But Goldstock redressed what he thought was a mistake on my part. After my meal, after I introduced myself, he



PHOTO: Shannon DeCelle

insisted I sample wings seasoned only with a dry rub. It could make a convert of me: I recommend them.

They fry their own crinkle-cut chips and serve them as a starter with horseradish sauce (\$6). A quesadilla is \$7, chicken nuggets are \$8, or you can even start with a \$9 half-rack. Salads are also available, and there's a sandwich menu (sliced sirloin, pulled pork, roasted turkey, fried haddock, burgers and more) for lunch or lighter dining (\$8-\$9).

That Want-to-Have-Barbecue-But-Don't-Want-to-Eat-Red-Meat favorite, chicken, is \$12. It was my wife's unsurprising choice, and was moist and tangy. She side-dished it with a baked potato and a dish of sweet butternut squash.

The eight entrée platters also include beef brisket, pork chop, tilapia, salmon (\$12-\$13), sirloin (\$20) and the "snort 'n cluck" combo of chicken and ribs (\$19), each of which demands a choice of two side dishes. Other sides include fries, macaroni salad, baked potato, creamed spinach and the vegetable of the day.

Daily specials often include a "garbage plate" (\$11), the name alone of which commended it to my daughter. It's a dinner bargain—if you're prepared to wade through a multilayered cacophony of pulled pork, barbecued chicken, macaroni salad, baked beans and fries.

We took undue advantage of the free soda refills and even then forced ourselves to finish with homemade apple crisp. All in all, a way-too-filling meal, leftover boxes notwithstanding, but real barbecue can do that to you. Give me a couple of weeks to recover, and I'll try it again.