

Cast Iron Skillet offers Southern cooking in the fast lane

BY ROB ROEDEL

When Toni Burrows was growing up in DeValls Bluff she helped her grandma and mom cook, and carefully learned how to prepare genuine Southern comfort food. Today, customers rave about the result of her lessons that are served at the Cast Iron Skillet in Conway.

Prior to opening the Cast Iron Skillet, Burrows had operated the Hole in the Wall restaurant nearby. The restaurant enjoyed great success as people craved the comfort foods of their youth. But, she had another idea.

"I really wanted a location with a drive-through window so people could take good Southern, homemade food home with them," she said, adding that



Enjoy real Southern cooking in Conway.

the eating essentials

CAST IRON SKILLET

2160 Harkrider
Conway
(501) 358-3518

Hours of Operation

Monday - Friday: 10:30 a.m. - 7:30 p.m.



when a regional restaurant chain closed a location with a drive-through window she jumped on the opportunity and launched Cast Iron Skillet in 2013. The former Hole in the Wall restaurant location is now the base for her catering and food truck operations.

The Cast Iron Skillet's motto is "real Southern cooking in the fast lane" and judging by the number of customers on the day of my visit, it is a hit.

"It takes a little longer than your typical drive-through food, but for what you get it is worth the extra time," Burrows said. "We cook everything from scratch and fresh. We don't use frozen or canned food. This kind of food has kind of fallen by the wayside, but I can taste the difference and everyone else can, too."

When she first entered the restaurant business she did all of the cooking herself, but as business increased she had to slow down and write the recipes down for her staff to follow.

"I strive for consistency in our food," she said. "It is so important that people get the same great Southern taste every time they dine with us."

During my visit I opted to dine in the restaurant and was impressed by the engaging and entertaining staff. The interior is tastefully decorated with blackboards and whiteboards that feature artwork and quotes from customers raving about the food.

The restaurant offers a cafeteria-type service with a daily feature deal that includes a meat, two sides, and cornbread or a roll. And, there are desserts. It was not easy to pick what to eat as everything looked awesome, so I



The chicken fried chicken is hand-breaded and the cornbread is a treat.

asked the servers to make three plates.

The first plate featured chicken fried chicken that was cooked to an iron skillet-like yumminess. The flavor was amazing. The meat on the second plate was the chicken parmesan, which was a chicken breast loaded with rich melted cheese and oven baked. It was scrumptiously delicious and an ultimate comfort food.

"The chicken parmesan is absolutely our best seller," Burrows said. "It has a white sauce and tons of fresh parmesan cheese and melts in your mouth."

The third plate featured meatloaf. Oh my. It was a bite of homemade



Chicken parmesan is a Cast Iron Skillet original recipe.

goodness and a reminder of childhood weeknight memories.

Oh, the veggies were perfect. No joke. The brown beans had splendid flavor and were slow cooked to Sunday afternoon perfection.

The Italian cut green beans were flavored with ham hocks and melt-in-your-mouth tender. The turnip greens were a serving of slow-cooked, pork- flavored heaven. The corn was nice and buttery, the fried okra was cooked perfectly and the mashed potatoes and cream gravy were great for dipping the chicken.

And then there were the desserts. The Oreo pie featured a graham cracker crust with a thick chocolate filling topped with cream and crushed Oreos. The cherry cheesecake had a wonderful crust filled with cherry filling and topped with cream meringue. The lemon pie had just the right amount of flavor to deliver a sweet, but tart flavor. The four-layer layer delight was a treat and reminded me of church potlucks. The peanut butter pie tasted exactly like a Reese's Peanut Butter Cup. And the strawberry shortcake was two layers of strawberry cake with a frosting and strawberries.

If you want some good, old-fashioned Southern cooking stop by the Cast Iron Skillet in Conway. Heck, you don't even have to stop by; you can get it to go. Now, that is cool. ■



A slice of Oreo pie.



The strawberry shortcake is yummo!

Dining recommendations? Contact Rob Roedel at rroedel@aecc.com

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