



Janssen's on the Lake: Summer Never Tasted So Good!

By Doug White

I had a buddy in high school whose family owned a restaurant on Grand Lake in Oklahoma. One summer, he worked at the restaurant and I did my best to spend as much time with him on the lake as I could. It was a glorious summer, filled with many memories of lake fun and good food.

Fast forward a few decades. The summer of 2011 in Arkansas has already begun. One of our state's most beautiful lakes, Greers Ferry, will be home to many thousands of getaway-seekers. My traveling companions and I sought a different kind of getaway – our respite was at the lunch table and our destination was Janssen's Lakefront Restaurant. After spending a few hours there, I am desperately trying to figure out a way to spend some more time at this wonderful place.



Taking orders

Greers Ferry Lake was created by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in the late 1960s with the formation of Greers Ferry Dam. The area, including the Little Red River, has some 40,000 acres of water and over 340 miles of shoreline. Greers Ferry boasts some of the finest fishing and recreation in the region, with beautiful blue water, rocky cliffs for diving and many fine places to find a good home-cooked meal.

In 1978, Fred Janssen moved his family from St. Louis to the little town of Edgemont. Fred purchased a hotel, and the following year he and his wife Pat opened Janssen's Lakefront Restaurant. Two of his employees, Tim and Fred, happened to be his sons.

"I had the greatest gig in the world," said Tim, now owner and chief cook. "My brother and I would work at the restaurant and then play on the lake the rest of the day."

Today, Janssen's has a loyal following of year-round regulars from around the lake and nearby communities. During the summer, business ramps up with all the seasonal travelers. Despite this ebb and flow each year, one thing remains the same: the diversity and quality of the food. It is, in a word, spectacular.

On our lunch visit, we nibbled on no less than six daily specials, including a sandwich special (ham and pepper jack croissant), a wrap special (buffalo chicken), a blue plate special (pot roast and vegetables), a burger special (angus) and a salad special (chicken fajita salad).

Tim is a stickler for mixing up the menu. "I don't like going to a restaurant and seeing the same items each time – it's too boring," said Tim. "We are very proud of the fact that you can always find something new here every day, whether for lunch or dinner."

The specials came out fresh and hot, in ample portions. The pot roast was tender and juicy, with just the right amount of herbs and spices. The wrap was a table favorite, with a Tabasco sauce on the chicken that was just spicy enough. The fajita salad was huge, with large strips of grilled chicken on a bed of fresh lettuce. Quite tasty!

Janssen's is also open for dinner and is quite the hot spot for the lake crowd, especially during the summer. "We are usually completely booked for Saturday night," said a beaming Tim. "It is not uncommon to have upwards of 100 people on the waiting list."

Why so popular? The service is attentive, friendly and fast. The ambience is a combination of urban cool and comfortable lake house friendly, with outstanding vistas of the lake, docks for boaters and a tree-lined shore. But it is the food that keeps folks coming back.

"We cut our own steaks and cook them on an open broiler," said Janssen. "I pretty much touch every plate and if someone is not happy with their meal, it really affects my mood. So I strive for perfection." Tim also oversees the



creation of all the desserts, including a chocolate mousse pie that was downright decadent.

The restaurant has gone through several changes over the past 33 years. It now has a liquor license as well as another smaller restaurant on the lake. Breakfast was offered every weekday morning until four years ago when the focus was placed on lunch and dinner. There is a very popular Sunday brunch (call for a table early!).

One thing that hasn't changed: the family aspect of Janssen's. Just as Tim and his little brother worked a little at the restaurant and played a lot on the lake, Tim and Beth's sons Hunter and Connor are following in their footsteps. They both work at the restaurant, washing dishes, serving food, tasting dad's latest creations. But give them a slight break in the action and off they go to the water. Just as it should be.

Janssen's is located at 7209 Greers Ferry Road in Edgemont. You can follow them on Facebook where they post the daily specials. They are open Thursday through Saturday from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. and also cater. Sunday brunch is from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Want to know more? Find video interviews, photos, recipes and more at Rural Arkansas Living on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/RuralArkansasLivingMagazine>. Do you have a restaurant to recommend for Doug? Contact him at doug.white@aacc.com.