

Cliff House offers home cooking, breathtaking view

BY ROB ROEDEL

On the advice of a friend, Mike and Becky McLaurin stopped at the Cliff House Restaurant for pie and coffee on their way to Branson. They liked the pie and, by the time they left the restaurant, they had decided to buy the historic eatery.

"It was a miracle the way things molded together," said Mike, who was previously in the ministry and oil business before buying the Cliff House Restaurant in 2006.



The Cliff House Restaurant offers a stunning view of "Arkansas' Grand Canyon" and some of the best food in Arkansas.

The restaurant opened on May 27, 1967, by Kenneth Carter, who owned acreage along Arkansas 7. Carter had a vision for tourism in the area and a restaurant that would overlook the deepest valley in Arkansas. The restaurant is appropriately named,

the eating essentials

CLIFF HOUSE RESTAURANT

Arkansas 7 (6 miles south of Jasper)
870-446-2292
www.cliffhouseinnar.com

Hours of Operation

March 15 through fall colors:
Sunday - Thursday 8 a.m. - 3 p.m.
Friday - Saturday 8 a.m. - 8 p.m.

as it is positioned on a cliff overlooking the "Arkansas Grand Canyon."

The view from the restaurant and its deck, which spans the length of the establishment, is one of the best in Arkansas. According to Mike and Becky, the fall colors are fabulous and tourists flock to the region to view the natural beauty.

When you visit the restaurant, you will be immediately struck by the view from the bluff and once your

food arrives, you will be awestruck by the splendid dishes lovingly prepared by the culinary team.

"We don't buy anything prepared," Mike said. "We bread our products with secret breading recipes. People still want quality and to enjoy a fine meal. We buy the

best products available."

Many of the restaurant's recipes were developed by Mike when he catered events while living in Louisiana.

During my visit, the windows were open and a light breeze swept across the dining room as patrons gazed across the valley below and chatted with the cheerful staff. Becky asked what I would like to sample and I told her to bring whatever their top sellers were. She nodded, flashed a grin and disappeared into the kitchen.

She returned with piping hot, perfectly colored, hot water cornbread served with honey. The Cliff House version of this Southern favorite was impeccably flavored with jalapenos and onions. The butter had



A "top secret" basting spray, cooked perfectly, makes the tenderloin filet a showstopper.

a unique flavor. Becky smiled and whispered that it was Tabasco butter. Yum-Yum!

The next dish was the Arkansas fried catfish platter. This mouth watering platter featured hand-breaded (with a secret breading) U.S.-raised catfish, coleslaw, pinto beans, fries, hot water cornbread, pickled green tomatoes, sliced onion and fresh, homemade tartar sauce. The filets were nice and thick and cooked to a tasty golden perfection. This platter could easily feed two.

A Philly cheese steak sandwich arrived. The sandwich was loaded with richly flavored beef with grilled green peppers and onions and Swiss cheese. This large sandwich was served on a Gambino's roll. The Gambinos of New Orleans are the creators of the French roll and the Cliff House gets a fresh delivery every Thursday. The toasted roll teamed with the tangy beef provides an unbelievable combination that is a crowd favorite.

Next, a classic chicken-fried steak platter was delivered. It showcased the homemade goodness that only a family-owned restaurant can offer. The fried piece of fresh beef heaven was hand-breaded with a secret coating, fried to a golden crispy state and covered with creamy white gravy. The plate featured

a Cliffhouse original classic – the Angel Flake Biscuit. Imagine a cross between a buttermilk biscuit and a yeast roll, and you have the flavor and texture.

The grilled chicken breast salad with mandarin oranges was a beautiful, a healthy option that doesn't skimp on taste. The salad, one of many on the menu, includes a large grilled chicken breast on a bed of lettuce, topped with juicy mandarin orange slices, tomato, onion and cheese.

Mike explained that the fried shrimp platter features large shrimp and, of course, a secret batter recipe. The shrimp were some of the best I have had, but the plate also featured green beans. As I sampled the green beans, I detected a unique flavor. He smiled and said, "It is bacon drippings." I suspect he added other ingredients, nonetheless, they were not your average green beans.

Then, the showstopper entered the room – the tenderloin filet. The opening acts were very good, but the headliner stole the show. This stunning piece of Buckhead beef is flavored with a classified, top secret basting spray (Mike was given the recipe by a former church member, who actually cooked for an event at the White House). The flavor is slightly sweet, but tempered with pepper. Mike cooks the steak in a ribbed skillet with simple ingredients. Oh, my. Oh, my. It is something you have to try!

For dessert, the cheerful staff presented the "official" Arkansas state pie, "Company's Comin' Pie," which is another recipe created by Mrs. McDaniel. This light, rich pie was unique and a treat. The crust features crushed saltine crackers and pecans while the filling consists of homemade whipped cream with pineapple and a light meringue. Several other desserts are prepared daily.

The Cliff House has the perfect recipe for a great dining experience. Give them a try. You will come back! ▀

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



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