

Chelle's casts a line on great fish and steaks

BY ROB ROEDEL

Mike and Loretta Hutchinson had a dream of running a successful restaurant when they opened their establishment on June 4, 1992. Today, their dream is a reality and they received a nice surprise in 1998 after more than 17 years of waiting.

The surprise was their daughter, Chelle, who is the apple of their eyes and the namesake of Chelle's Grille and Catering in Camden. The high school sophomore grew up in the restaurant

and can now perform just about any function in the large, tastefully decorated eatery. The décor includes many impressive fish and deer mounts that



Chelle Hutchinson delivers one of the restaurant's wonderful salads.

the eating essentials

CHELLE'S GRILLE AND CATERING

1280 Arkansas 278 Bypass
Camden
(870) 836-8300

Wednesday - Thursday: 11:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.;
5:00 - 8:00 p.m.

Friday: 11:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.; 5:00 - 9:00 p.m.

Saturday: 5:00 - 9:00 p.m.

Sunday: 11:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.



Chelle's is a local favorite in Camden.

Mike and Chelle caught or harvested.

While waiting for the Hutchinsons to complete the lunch service, they delivered a platter of piping hot hushpuppies. The golden-fried pieces of cornmeal heaven were very good and hit the spot as a preview of the homemade fare to come.

Chelle's offers daily lunch specials and on the day of the Let's Eat visit, we were served a hamburger steak topped with sautéed green peppers and onions that were bathed in rich brown gravy. The lean beef offering was very tasty as the veggies added nice color and even better flavor. The plate also included creamy mashed potatoes and a corn muffin. I also sampled a cup of "Jazzy" pinto beans that had a spicy flavor and excellent taste.

Two fish tacos were next on the menu. These new takes on the classic hand-held entrée featured blackened tilapia fillets, chopped onion and tomatoes wrapped in warm flour tortilla shells. The fish had a great blackened



The restaurant is known for its outstanding catfish and shrimp.

flavor, but Chelle's "Sha Bang" sauce made the tacos about 20 clicks above average.

Chelle's has a decades-long reputation for fried U.S.D.A. catfish and shrimp that feature Mike's custom homemade breading. We enjoyed large catfish fillets that were cooked to a golden brown and huge butterflied fried shrimp. Although we faithfully utilized the "Sha Bang" sauce, Mike told us that he also makes the cocktail and tarter sauces from scratch also.

Chelle's began offering hand-cut Omaha Black Angus rib-eye steaks about two years ago and the 14-ounce



Comfort food plate lunches are offered daily.



The rib-eye steaks are mouth-watering.

cuts now rival the fish in popularity. The large, succulent steak delivered to our table oozed with juices and looked too good to cut. It was served with a large baked potato, side salad and Texas toast. But, we dug in and were very pleased by its impressive charbroiled flavor. It had a nice peppery taste that accentuated the meat's natural flavors. Mike has a secret steak marinade and hand cuts the steaks daily. Chelle is also entrusted with the secret recipe and serves as Mike's alternate, if he is out of town.

"My daughter grew up in the restaurant," Mike said. "She can cook anything on the menu and can handle just about any job in the restaurant."

The final entrée was a blend of Chelle's heritage and new offerings — a charbroiled, blackened salmon filet. The large filet was blackened on the outside, but moist within and rivaled the steak's charbroiled flavor. I reached for the "Sha Bang" sauce, but after one bite it was clear that the salmon's flavor was too good to change. Mike concocts his own blend of spices for the salmon and has mastered the blend to perfection.

"We make friends with all of our customers," Loretta said. "Many of them eat here two or three times each week and have done so for years. We treat everyone like they are family." ■

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

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