

# Chill out at Tailgaters Burger Company

BY ROB ROEDEL

In 2010, long time friends John and Sharon Caldwell, and Bobby and Melinda Brinkmeyer talked about opening a restaurant where customers could be as relaxed as if they were sitting on the tailgate of a pickup truck. The result is Tailgaters Burger Company located across from the train depot in downtown Hope.



A vintage pick-up truck greets diners at Hope's Tailgaters Burger Company.

## the eating essentials

### TAILGATERS BURGER COMPANY

101 South Main St.  
Hope  
(870) 777-4444

#### Hours of Operation

Monday - Saturday: 11 a.m. - 9 p.m.  
www.tailgatersburgerco@yahoo.com



Prior to opening in 2011, the two couples spent a year lovingly restoring the 103-year-old building, which was formerly a hotel. The couples spent nights and weekends removing layers of plaster, uncovering beautiful windows and repurposing items located throughout the two-story building. The result of their labor created a jewel for downtown Hope and a very popular gathering spot for locals and hungry travelers alike.

The restaurant is decorated with interesting local memorabilia that John collected. In addition to signs and photographs on the walls, a restored 1960 Mustang scooter is suspended from the ceiling. Bobby, a welder, custom built the massive neon sign that hangs outside at the corner of the building. And fitting with the Tailgaters name, Bobby created seats from pickup truck tailgates that adorn one wall. The men can tell you the origin of each piece of the building, which shows their sincere love for their restaurant.

While the friends were restoring the building, they also developed a simple menu that uses fresh ingredients and the best meat available. The couples sampled many brands of beef and many types of breads before settling on what they now serve.

Diners place their orders at a restored counter from a large chalk board menu. The fare is simple, but interesting and includes sandwiches, hot dogs, hamburgers with hand-cut French fries, onion strings, fried pickles and fried green beans. The entrees are creative and diners can



Tailgaters has some creative burger options or you can pick your own toppings.

order hamburgers or hot dogs with any toppings desired.

"We work to make everyone feel comfortable and enjoy their dining experience," Bobby said. "There are times that we have people lined up outside to dine with us. As an owner there is no better feeling than seeing people want to eat at your restaurant."

The first offering sampled was the popular "Applewood Bacon Cheeseburger." This burger featured a half-pound beef patty topped with thick slices of crisp applewood bacon, provolone cheese, lettuce, tomato, onion and mayo. The fresh bread was a perfect "wrapper" for the perfectly cooked burger that was juicy and tasty. Zesty fried dill pickle chips were a nice side dish.

Next was my favorite, the "Onion



The "Heart Attack Hot Dog" and hand-cut French fries.

Burger." It was topped with fried onion strings, melted American cheese, lettuce, tomato and "Tailgaters Boom Sauce." And, the fried green beans on the side were an addictive item.

The "Heart Attack Hot Dog" was a unique entrée. This crowd pleaser is a 100 percent all-beef Kosher-style link. Here is where it gets interesting. The hot dog is cut into two parts, stuffed with Swiss cheese, wrapped in bacon and then deep-fried. It is topped with mustard and served on a fresh toasted bun. I have eaten many, many hot dogs, but this one definitely wins the "top dog" award for taste and creativity. I urged a fellow diner to try a bite and after doing so she exclaimed that she was ordering the entrée during her next visit.

The hand-cut fries served at Tailgater's are a half-inch thick and prepared to crispy perfection. A great seasoning spice is used to bring out the fresh flavors of the long and thick fries.

I thought I was through sampling dishes, and then two milkshakes were delivered. Wow. I was stuffed, but did my duty and sampled the classic, hand-dipped chocolate and strawberry milkshakes. As a matter of fact, I managed to consume most of the chocolate shake as it was delicious.

"When someone buys a milkshake and everyone sees it being delivered we usually sell five or six more immediately," Bobby said.

Pull off the main road, drop down a tailgate and enjoy the friendly, relaxing atmosphere and home-town food at Tailgaters Burger Company. ■



Perfect milkshakes are offered to accompany the hamburgers.

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