

Baja Grill: Seriously good food on wheels

BY SHEILA YOUNT

Next month will mark a full year since the Baja Grill food truck moved to its current location on Military Road in Benton. And the move has proven to be a good one as the grill has gained legions of fans for its “Mexi-Cali” style food.

Owners Craig and Melissa Roe, Benton residents and members of First Electric Cooperative, operated the food truck briefly in Bryant before moving it to Benton’s busiest thoroughfare. The response to the food has far exceeded the couple’s expectations.

“We’ve had people call us to tell us it was the best food they’ve ever had,” Craig said. “And we’ve had that happen over and over again.”

Melissa and Craig Roe outside Baja Grill.



the eating essentials

BAJA GRILL

1130 Military Road, Benton
501.722.8920
www.eatbajagrill.com

Hours of Operation

Monday - Friday: 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.
And 5 p.m. to 8 p.m.



Melissa said repeat customers are created regularly.

“We often see people come to eat for the first time and then we see them again two or three times in the same week,” she said.

Craig’s interest in cooking began as a youth growing up Hot Springs where he watched his mother, Kay, cook delicious Southern cuisine. His culinary interest grew as he worked in restaurants during high school. He also worked as a banquet cook for a hotel and attended a culinary school.

Then, he said, his career path took an entirely different direction. He and Melissa were married in 2004 and pursued careers in sales and real estate. But something was missing, they said.

“Both of us were working, but we were not satisfied,” Craig said, adding that they each enjoyed cooking and are “Food Network junkies.” So they decided to try the food business and began designing the menus and a logo. They went the food truck route because it was less expensive than a restaurant, although that is their goal.

The Roes developed the menu based on food that they liked to cook and eat at home. The style is Mexican-Californian instead of the more common Tex-Mex offerings found across the state. Melissa, who grew up in Texas, said Mexican food has always been her favorite.

With the “Mexi-Cali” approach, you won’t find anything fried at the Baja Grill, other than the tortilla chips. With smoked and grilled meats, combined with fresh vegetables and sauces, cheeses, salsas, guacamole and a creamy white cheese dip, the food has a healthy slant.



The “Blackened Mahi Mahi,” left, and “The Cuban” are the most popular tacos at Baja Grill.

Tacos are at the heart of the Baja Grill’s offerings and that’s why Baja Grill is officially a “taco truck” and not just a “food truck.” Each taco has its own special sauce, including verde, honey-chipotle and mango salsa, and is made with the freshest of ingredients. The ingredients are placed inside soft corn tortillas from a tortillaria in Little Rock. (Flour tortillas are also available.)

The most popular taco, Craig said, is “The Cuban,” which features smoked pork on a bed of sour orange red cabbage-jicama slaw. It is topped with chipotle aioli, avocado and fresco cheese. Oddly enough, the now popular taco wasn’t a hit right off the bat.

“After about a month, I was going to take it off the menu and then all of a sudden it just took off,” Craig said.

Second to “The Cuban” in popularity are the seafood tacos – “Blackened Shrimp” and “Blackened Mahi Mahi.” Each are tossed in a special “Baja” marinade, covered with blackened seasoning and grilled. The fish and shrimp are then served on beds of dry slaw, topped with fresh mango salsa, tequila lime aioli and fresco cheese. The blackened seasoning can really pack a punch, so if spicy-hot isn’t



The "Pig Sooie" burrito.

your style, just ask them to prepare it with the less spicy house seasoning.

While tacos are the mainstays, any version, except the two seafood offerings, can also be made into burritos. On a recent visit, I tried the "Pig Sooie" burrito and it was unlike any burrito I had ever had. The smoked pork, the barbecue-style sauce and coleslaw gave it a familiar Southern barbecue taste while the rice and beans, and queso blanco topping added the Mexican flair.

Other offerings include quesadillas, a "Kid-a-dilla," a child-size quesadilla,

and a vegetarian taco and burrito. The queso blanco and guacamole dips are addictive, and the salsa is just right – not too hot and not too mild. Adding "Baja Rice"



Owner Craig Roe with his made-to-order tacos.

and "Baja Black Beans" to any order make for a full meal.

The Roes take advantage of social media in promoting Baja Grill. By liking the grill's Facebook page, you can learn about the grill's many specials and discounts.

Everything is made to order so it will be as fresh as possible. Because of that, it is best to call ahead at 501.722.8920 for your order as lunches and dinners are often very busy. ■

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



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