



Get Hooked on The Whippet



by ROB ROEDEL

When my family first visited The Whippet Restaurant and Dairy Bar about 12 years ago, I loved the relaxing drive, the atmosphere and the food. It was even better when I recently visited the unique Prattsville institution.

The restaurant, which is renowned for its catfish spread, is owned by Derek and Debbie Henderson. Their children, Brittany and Drew, have worked at the restaurant. They have 15 other employees who work to ensure that visitors are treated like family.



"I enjoy the cooking," said Derek Henderson, who commuted to Maumelle before purchasing The Whippet in 1994. "There isn't anything about our business that I don't enjoy. I love the people. I love my five minute commute."

His love of cooking is very evident. During my visit, I asked him to fix me whatever he wanted me to sample. He grinned and disappeared into the kitchen. While he and



his team were preparing the feast, I took note of the Prattsville High School senior class composite photographs. The framed pieces of history began in the 1950s and ended in 1994. According to Derek, that was the last graduating class before Prattsville High School merged with neighboring Sheridan High School.

The two waitresses working during my visit, Buffy Teague and Susan McGarity, began delivering plates heaped with food to my table. The tabletops feature advertisements from local businesses, as well as a family photograph and message from the Henderson family welcoming visitors and thanking them for dining at The Whippet. As I gazed at the beautiful dishes of food on the table, I wanted to say, "No, thank you for letting me eat here!"

The catfish was delivered piping hot, crispy and cooked just right. It is served with fries, beans, made-from-scratch coleslaw, tomato relish and hushpuppies. As for the beans, the serving, in a bowl, includes five different types of beans. I asked for the bean recipe but was quickly told that it was "top secret."

Marie Bell of Pine Bluff was also dining during the visit. She said that The Whippet is her usual stopping point between her home and Hot Springs. "I usually get the catfish, but today I went with the cheeseburger. It was delicious."

I sampled the Whippet Cheeseburger. This isn't just



a regular burger; it burst with flavors that made me keep taking bites. The Whippet Cheeseburger features a secret Whippet sauce, lettuce, tomato, pickle, grilled onions and bacon. "The Whippet Cheeseburger is one of our most popular menu items," Derek said.

Next, I attacked the Fancy Chili Dog. The foot-long version of this creation could probably feed two people. It is dressed with chili, mayonnaise, mustard, coleslaw, lettuce, jalapenos, tomatoes, pickles and melted cheese.

The barbecue was the next plate. The pork and beef were both very tasty and featured a sweet, tangy flavor with a hint of smoke. The Henderson family doesn't skip on any of their offerings, so the barbecue comes with beans, cole slaw and rolls.

Henderson also prepared a few very healthy and fresh salads. He said that salad selections include a chef salad, grilled chicken, chicken strip, taco or barbecue.

Tuesday nights are Steak Night at The Whippet. The special includes a cooked-to-order rib-eye steak served with your choice of potato, deep-fried yeast roll and dinner salad for \$15.99.

"I try to get the best steaks on the market," Henderson said. "I have been told that they rival the steaks served at higher-priced restaurants."

As I sampled the





rib-eye steak, I began planning a Tuesday night trip to Prattville. The steak was cooked just right – fork tender and had a great flavor.

The Whippet is also a dairy bar, so the next items were ice cream drizzled with chocolate and caramel sauce and a fried chocolate pie. The fried pie and ice cream were perfect. Other fried pies available are: apple, blueberry, peach, coconut, apricot, raisin, sweet potato, cherry and blackberry. I also sampled a delicious slice of coconut pie. Of course, there are also hand-dipped ice cream cones, floats, frosties, sundaes, shakes and banana splits.

To help parents and entertain youngsters, the Hendersons have a children's room. This neatly decorated space features wooden trains and other items to occupy the younger diners once they finish off their selection from the Kid's Menu.

President Bill Clinton and local country music star Justin Moore of Poyen are among the celebrities who have sampled The Whippet's fare. Visitors from across the United States, China and Canada have also dined at the restaurant. Another claim to fame for Prattville is that it is the hometown of the Stephens family, who founded and own Little Rock-based Stephens, Inc., the largest investment banking firm outside of Wall Street. •

The Whippet Restaurant and Dairy Bar

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