

AN AGGIE TRADITION IN BARBECUE

Martin's Place stands alone as the oldest restaurant in town

By Dave Thomas

THE BATTALION

Aggies aren't particularly known for embracing change. And not too far from the heart of Texas A&M stands a lone, red-brick building that hasn't changed much in 54 years.

Inside the building is a restaurant, complete with a horseshoe bar and a half-dozen wooden tables. A pool table, television and domino table all hoard separate corners. The smell of barbecue lingers in the air.

The decor is varied: old farm implements, horse-show ribbons, Parsons' Mounted Cavalry mementos and Aggie football memorabilia compete for attention. Several different brands of beer all try in vain to drown out Lone Star's claim as "the National Beer of Texas." Old wooden signs advise customers "No Credit" and "Saw Varsity's Horns Off... Short!"

Martin's Place is a standout in the world of "here today, gone tomorrow" restaurants and fast food joints. Martin's, the only family-owned and oldest restaurant in town, has been serving barbecue since Martin Kapchinski moved from Marlin in 1925.

Third-generation owner Steve Kapchinski said his grandfather settled right there on the corner of 3403 South College where Martin's Place stands today.

"This area used to be dirt roads and fields. The original Martin's was an old wooden building," Steve said. "It had the barbecue pit on the outside. If you look in the parking lot, you can still see the bricks from the old pit."

Back then, the farmers would all drive their wagons into town on Saturdays, and they would stop by to get barbecue on their way to Bryan.

The original Martin's building lasted 14 years, until the business grew to the point where a bigger building was needed.

"Two good things happened

in 1939," Steve said. "A&M won its only national championship, and a bigger Martin's was built." Things have stayed pretty much the same since then.

Ada Holler, Steve's sister-in-law and a Martin's employee, said the only changes she can remember are paneling the walls and buying matching tables.

"We used to eat off beer cases or whatever else we could make a table out of," she said.

Other than barbecue plates, Martin's offers sandwiches, chicken fried steak, chicken strips, catfish, cheeseburgers, beans and hunks of cheese.

And beer.

About 6:00 or so, the after-work crowd begins to wander in. Ada is there to greet them with their favorite brand of beer. But this is a quiet crowd, and they are content to watch Wheel of Fortune and talk about the lottery.

"We do get a lot of characters in here, but this is a very family-

"Two good things happened in 1939, A&M won its only national championship, and a bigger Martin's was built."

-Steve Kapchinski, third-generation owner of Martin's

oriented place," Ada said. "People bring their children in here."

Ada said the "rough crowd" are the older men who play dominoes in the afternoon and especially on Saturday.

"They play for blood. Not all of them get along so well, but we always have a good time," she said.

Steve agreed, "The domino table gets pretty intense, but it's all in fun. There's no gambling or anything."

Besides the beer and dominoes, what brings the regulars back time after time is the barbecue.



Kyle Burnett/THE BATTALION

E.D. Lambert (right), a retired postal worker, and H.O. Canty, a retired carpenter, play dominos in Martin's on Wednesday afternoon. Lambert (who is 82 years old) and Canty (who is 86), meet at Martin's six days a week to play.

Steve is proud to explain how he has achieved such customer loyalty.

"I'm still doing everything the way my granddad did. I still cook the old-timer way. I put the fire on one end, and I take the coals and shoot 'em under the meat. I don't do the modern stuff where you just walk off and leave it. I have to watch it every minute."

He said he first started cooking nearly 25 years ago when he was a boy.

"My first job was cleaning out the pits, and I hated it. I still do."

Those pits were built in 1939, and Steve still uses them today although they're beginning to show some signs of age.

"People often ask me, 'When're you going to build another pit?'" Steve said. "Well, the only way I'll build another one is if this one falls in; there's lots of flavor in there."

The flavor isn't limited to the food.

Perhaps the most colorful figure in Martin's history is Steve's uncle, Steve Holik. A true Aggie fan, Uncle Stevie worked in the campus mess halls from 1936 until 1946 and would ride on the train with the football team to away games.

"My uncle told me that 'Bear' Bryant used to come and eat here, but I can't remember that for sure," Steve said.

In 1946 Uncle Stevie began working at Martin's and soon be-

came a 'living legend' there. Some people say that it would only take one visit before he could remember what you liked to drink.

Ada has fond memories of her uncle. "We still have Aggies come through here and have to leave when they find out Uncle Stevie died, they get so choked up. Uncle Stevie never let an Aggie leave here hungry; he'd give him a bowl of beans or something."

Steve said he'd still like to feed the Aggies.

"We're getting a lot of business people during lunch, but we're not getting as many students as before," he said. "A lot of them just don't know we're here."

"Lots of people drive by and nothing stands out," Steve said. "I don't know what to do. I'd hate to do any changing on the outside of the building because that'd kind of ruin the history of the place."

Glancing back into that history, Steve still has one of the original menus his grandfather used when he opened Martin's Place 67 years ago. Back then a T-bone steak was 45 cents and goose liver on toast was 15 cents. You could even get breakfast back then; pancakes and bacon were only 20 cents.

Steve said he doesn't think he'll sell goose liver on toast again. And he doesn't think he'll return to the original prices.

Camp

Continued from Page 2

best resources to offer graduate students and how we should approach them."

Dumas said he and Faw are considering structuring Grad Camp to fall over a football weekend early in the semester so the graduate students might attend a Midnight Yell together.

According to Dumas and Faw's

tentative plans, the graduate students will break off into their respective colleges with older graduate students as counselors. Programs will be presented concerning issues such as traditions, financial aid, interviewing skills and finding a job.

Dumas said Grad Camp hopes to invite professors and former graduate students to talk to the graduate students.

"One thing that will be really beneficial to the students at Grad Camp is the opportunity to form friendships with the people they

will be working with throughout their graduate studies," Dumas said.

He said Grad Camp will be similar to Fish Camp in that it promotes friendship between the students, but will be structurally different in order to cater to graduate students.

"We can't exactly play 'chubby bunny' with a group of graduate students," Dumas said. "We know that and are looking at things that will best suit their needs."

However, Faw said Grad

Camp is seeking ideas from people with experience in Fish Camp and T-Camp.

"We need enthusiastic people who are really excited about this program," Faw said. "It would help to have ideas from people involved in Fish Camp or T-Camp who have peer counseling experience."

Walker said he has received support for Grad Camp from the administration, but funding is still a concern. He said Grad Camp will begin in the fall, providing no major problems arise.

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