

What Flavor is Happiness? Street Meet Has the Recipe

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New York City has hotdogs. Philadelphia has cheese steaks. New Orleans has po' boys. But Hilton Head Island has it all and much more, thanks to Carey Basciano, owner of Street Meet American Takeout and Tavern. The unique eatery, tucked away in the corner of Port Royal Plaza, pays tribute to the best of American street food, drawing inspiration from the sidewalk vendors of yesteryear, while taking the cuisine to a fresh new level.

According to Basciano, he set out to create a restaurant reminiscent of the neighborhood tavern he knew from childhood. "Back when I was a kid, there were no chain restaurants. You went to the tavern with your parents or grandparents to eat," he said. "When you graduated from high school or college, you went back there for some drinks. When you moved away from home, that's the place where you returned to meet your friends."

Hoping to establish that same sort of cross-generational comfort zone, Basciano said, "Our goal as a business was to create something that would appeal to three generations of island residents: families with children, young adults and retirees. Twenty years from now, I want to see my children and their friends come back from college and come here to meet their friends."

What's cookin'?

Beating the streets of America right here at home, as the general manager at Harbourside Café in Sea Pines for 12 years, Basciano informally polled residents and visitors, asking about their regional favorites. Combining what he learned with what he already knew from his own street food experiences, he took all the best and made it better. "I worked on the menu with friends for years to try to bring it together and present it in a different way," he said.

The concept is one of authenticity, freshness and fusion. "The whole thing is to bring American fast food up," said Basciano, whose originality is evident in every menu item. "The idea is to serve fun food that people love." But it's the mixing and matching that makes it remarkable: soft pretzels served with crab and shrimp dip, pulled pork nachos with Carolina barbecue sauce, or pierogies with wing sauce and blue cheese.

If you're expecting pre-made, over-processed food typical of many fast food institutions, you won't find it at Street Meet. What you will find are top-quality, homemade versions of your favorite street food. Hotdogs (the house specialty) are flown in from Syracuse, New York, from a company that has been making them since 1879, and served with a variety of toppings to suit the most discriminating street palate. Burgers are made from fresh ground chuck and pattied by hand; cheese steaks start with whole prime rib, roasted in house; and turkey clubs begin with fresh, whole birds, fried on the premises. What surprises people most is the selection of seafood, salads and vegetarian entrées, said Basciano, whose daily offerings include homemade black bean burgers, veggie dogs and vegetarian chili along with Lowcountry favorites such as crab

cakes, oysters and a variety of fresh fish.

The street scene

While the food is the main draw, the setting itself is something to see. To enter the main dining area is to be transported to another place in time. That's because Basciano, a self-described history buff, did his homework.

Recreating a turn-of-the-century street corner, the faux cobblestone floor, authentic antique manhole covers, and wall mural of the famous brick stairway to Savannah's River Street put you in the alleyway. Framed prints of street vendors from across America line the adjacent walls, while an old-fashioned clothesline hangs above the door, further drawing you into the era.

Look to your left and you are peering into a 1930s-style tavern, "Floyd's Hideaway," mimicking a post-prohibition speakeasy, complete with vintage NCR cash register and a collection of original antique parking meters. Lending even more authenticity are the bullet holes in the wall and a mug shot of Charles "Pretty Boy" Floyd.

"It's a glorified lunch counter," said Basciano, explaining that the theme is more about décor than the bar. "The food and the décor go hand in hand, because that's how it used to be in communities where you had generations of people growing up together and never relocating or moving. You had that neighborhood tavern where everyone went," he said.

Behind the scenes

"One of the special things about our restaurant is that we are all family and friends here," said Basciano. The supporting staff includes his wife, Shelby, his sister, three former college roommates, and a longtime island friend. Executive chef Rafael Palacios has three family members working with him in the kitchen. "All of us have about 15 kids together. We're truly a family business," said Basciano.

Serving continuously from 11 a.m.-1 a.m., daily, Street Meet is the perfect place to grab a meal any time. "You can come here at midnight and get salad or soup or a full entrée," said Basciano. "It doesn't have to be wings or chicken fingers." By the same token, you can drop by for happy hour, come in before or after the theatre or a round of golf or bring the kids after soccer.

No matter what your age, the bill comes with a round of "Dubble Bubble" gum, complete with comic strip insert. If that doesn't make you happy, nothing will.

Fried Twinkie, anyone?

For a sneak peek at the menu, visit www.streetmeethi.com, or call 843-842-2570 for more information. Outdoor seating available with a fabulous parking lot view—perfect for people watching!