



# DINNER with a view

Benson's on the Mississippi offers a riverside dining experience

By Colten Bradford

**WHEN BUD AND STEPHANIE** Benson purchased their 150-plus-year-old building along the Mississippi River in Albany during the fall of 2019 for their new restaurant, they did not anticipate a global pandemic to begin just months later.

"With the great idea that we would do some cosmetic work in the restaurant and then open in the spring of 2020, we did not know that little thing called COVID was going to happen," Stephanie says. "Everything was delayed, and we had our problems, as everybody did."

The Bensons, who are consumer-members of JCE Co-op, decided to gut the place, and they used the building to its best advantage. The building formerly housed another restaurant, with the main dining room in the front and the kitchen in the back; the Bensons

reconfigured the space to move the dining room to the back of the building to put the mighty Mississippi on display.

"The view is the selling point," Stephanie says. The dining room itself is in a Quonset hut (a structure characterized by its semi-cylindrical shape) that was added to the building sometime over the years. On the back wall, five large windows were installed for views of the Mississippi River. "It's fun to watch boats coming up and down the river," she continues. "There's wildlife. We capture a lot of beautiful sunsets."

"There's really no bad seat," Stephanie explains to anyone requesting a table with a view of the river. "You can even see the river from the bar-room." That bar, located in the front of the building, is made from old beams that used to hold up the structure.





Opposite page: (left) smoked prime rib, served medium rare, comes with a side salad, grilled asparagus and mashed potatoes; (top) fish plate with hushpuppies, fries, sweet pepper slaw, and homemade tartar and cocktail sauces; (middle) pan-seared scallops; (bottom) homemade vanilla cheesecake with strawberry sauce. This page: (left) dining room with views of the Mississippi River; (right) owners Stephanie and Bud Benson.

A carpenter by trade, Bud did much of the renovation himself. However, his passion is cooking, and he's the head chef of the operation. His culinary journey began in the state of Mississippi, where he worked in restaurants on the side for a decade. He learned how to cook on the job.

"In some ways, he's self-taught," Stephanie says. "He didn't go to culinary school. He just had this passion for cooking. He started working in restaurants and learned [along the way]. He is passionate about it. . . . And if you look at our menu, there's a southern flair to it."

This menu includes a lot of hickory-smoked meats and freshwater fish, and one of the more popular dishes is only served on Thursdays. That dish, the low country shrimp boil, includes shrimp, corn on the cob, red potatoes and andouille sausage, which can be tossed in Bud's homemade garlic sauce.

Another favorite dish is also a regular special, only served on Fridays and Saturdays. The smoked prime rib, tender and served medium rare, comes with a side salad, grilled asparagus and mashed potatoes. All specials are available while supplies last. Other occasional specials include gumbo, Cajun pasta and pan-seared scallops.

On the regular menu, other frequent picks include the brisket plate (thick strips of hickory-smoked brisket), the loaded smoked gouda mac and cheese topped with pulled pork, and a variety of freshwater fish, sourced as fresh as possible in North America. "When we started, we were focused on [food] Bud likes — hickory-smoked meats — and then we kept adding fish. People love bluegill around here, and walleye isn't on everybody's menu anymore."

While each type of fish served is featured in dishes of their own, customers can try them all with the fish plate. This includes walleye, catfish, bluegill and shrimp, all lightly beer-battered and fried crisp, served with hushpuppies, fries, sweet pepper slaw, and homemade tartar and cocktail sauces.

While Bud may be the head chef, don't leave without a slice of Stephanie's cheesecake. The generous slice of homemade vanilla cheesecake can be topped with strawberry or caramel sauce. Other flavors are also occasionally featured, such as cinnamon roll and peanut butter cup.

"Food made fresh will have the best flavor," Stephanie says. "That's what we want to offer to our customers, because that's what we're passionate about. . . . We just want to take care of people and do the best we can." 💡

## LET'S EAT!

### Benson's on the Mississippi

108 S. Main St., Albany  
309-514-2046  
bensonsonthemississippi.com

#### HOURS

Thu-Sat: 4:30-9 p.m.  
*Reservations encouraged*

