

CULTURE

Finger-lickin' good

Croonin' and spoonin' up barbecue at Tennessee Red's

BY GINA DAGGETT



Sarah Cautle-French sets you up at Tennessee Red's

Since Kim Shaw acquired Tennessee Red's in the fall of 2002, barbecue and karaoke have gone together like lesbians and the Egyptian Club (which Shaw also happens to own). Two nights a week, it's the new hot spot for karaoke singers, while the barbecue is hot all week long.

Whether you're in the mood for brisket or gumbo or to sing your favorite song, Tennessee Red's, on the cusp of Ladd's Addition at 2133 S.E. 11th Ave., is the place to go.

Since the purchase by Shaw and her business partner, Sarah Cautle-French, there have been few changes to this Portland barbecue staple of the past eight years. The women have no big plans to change the bar, aside from the strapping cocktails they've been pouring with their new liquor license.

Also, in the past, Tennessee Red's had been more of sit-down place that moved a lot of takeout. Now, the two hope to bring in the industrial neighborhood for lunch specials and the bar crowd at night.

After the sun goes down "it's a hangout neighborhood place," says Shaw. While the clientele is a mixed crowd, "we do have a fun, hip group of gay men that regularly come in."

In addition to the locals trickling in for a cold beer or one of their house drinks, many "neighborhood people also contribute to the place, which is kind of cool," says Cautle-French. "One person...donated a bubble machine because he thought it would look cool during the DJ and the karaoke...another neighbor-patron painted flames on the wall near the kitchen."

If you're riding on your bike, don't be surprised if you get knocked over by the smell of barbecue, as they smoke their meat outside (even in the inevitable rain). The sauce, an original recipe Cautle-French excavated from a box in the kitchen, is used to give the menu items a sweet, smoky kick.

The pool table and pinball and lottery machines add saloon ambiance to Tennessee Red's, but the big draw is karaoke jockey Chris, who adds a little spice to your meal beginning at 9 p.m. Mondays and Tuesdays.

Warming up the crowd with tunes like "The Devil Went Down to Georgia," Chris reins in others who bravely sing out of key and a few who belt out better versions of "Love Me Tender" than Elvis himself.

If singing's not your thing, but an aperitif and late bites are, check out the place after dark. With drinks like "Gee, but I hate to go home alone"—a concoction of tequila, sweet and sour, Midori, Grand Marnier and a splash of lime juice—you're sure to stay later than you should. The late-night menu, which is served from 10 p.m., is both reasonable and generous, offering comfort food like a rack of ribs and Jo Jo's.

And, like any good bar, when KJ Chris isn't sliding in the CDs, your dollar bills at the jukebox are. The box is as diverse as the neighborhood—Neil Young, Modest Mouse, Willie Nelson and Sarah Vaughan—and sure to give anyone a reason to bounce from one foot to the other while waiting for the pulled pork.

So whether you're looking for some good sticky-fingered barbecue, to sing an old tune or for a new watering hole to hang your hat in, Tennessee Red's is unpretentious, is gay-owned and has the best early-week karaoke scene in town. **J**

TENNESSEE RED'S is open from 11 a.m. to 2:30 a.m. weekdays and from noon to 2:30 a.m. weekends. Call them at 503-231-1710.

GINA DAGGETT is a Portland free-lance writer.



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