



SO MUCH MORE THAN BACON

BACON NATION IS THE BACKLASH AGAINST THE BACKLASH AGAINST BACON

BY NICK POUST • PHOTOS TRASK BEDORTHA & TODD COOPER

For eight years, Bret Ford exchanged his chef's hat for gardening equipment, but he recently had the desire to get back into the cooking world. The former chef at Ambrosia, among other restaurants throughout Oregon, wasn't looking to go back to the same environment, however. More than 20 years after his wife's grandfather suggested running a restaurant on wheels, he and his wife took it to heart. And that's how Bacon Nation began — a place that serves much more than what its name suggests.

"We lost Grandpa about a year ago, and that's just about the time I had an epiphany," he says. "I just decided to do something different and got a fire going under my backside. We call the truck 'George' because George kind of manifested the idea."

Upon finding "George," a 30-foot-long 1985 Chevrolet P30 step van, everything else fell into place. Ford's work at Ambrosia, an overall love for food and an experimental mentality influenced how he orchestrated his own restaurant and created its menu.

"You eat with your eyes first," he says. "Though I'm not classically trained in the CIA, the Culinary Institute of America, I learned from the 'school of hard knocks.' I just inserted myself into the best restaurants in the area when I moved here in '89 that I could find." Ford settled on naming the business after bacon because of its aroma. "Everyone has a memory of bacon cooking for breakfast or camping," he says.

In addition to his restaurant experience, the knowledge he acquires from eating out, watching the Food Network and midnight brainstorm sessions is exemplary in what the Omaha, Neb., native serves. As he says, it's "not just a cheeseburger with some bacon on it." There are sandwiches featuring everything from pork loin to smoked chicken to, yes, bacon-wrapped hot dogs, with sauces such as bacon pesto aioli and their BBQ sauce that is done "the real Kansas City BBQ way," without ketchup, and takes an entire day to make.

After diving into a unique and eclectic entrée, it's time for some chocolate bacon. If it sounds weird, that's because it is, but that doesn't mean it isn't delicious or popular.

"Chocolate bacon? Eww, that sounds gross," Ford says. "One person buys it and carries it away and you watch the wake of people looking at it — they turn around and come up and ask, 'What did that person have? Chocolate bacon? I'll take one of those.'"

Ford occasionally gets his chocolate from Euphoria, ingredients for entrées from Cash and Carry, cheese from Central Point, pork from Carlton Farms and chicken from Draper Farms. The result: gourmet, mouth-watering and flavorful dishes clearly made by someone who knows what he's doing.

"We try to buy the most top-shelf ingredients as we can," he says. "We don't buy anything pre-made. We make everything."

A lot goes into running his mobile restaurant, but he is as invested in continued success as he is in quality of food.

"I set the bar very high," he says. "After three months of doing this, I need to set the bar high. It's fun, it's challenging and it's rewarding, too." ■

Bacon Nation frequents breweries and vineyards around Eugene, including Ninkasi, Viking Braggot Company and LaVelle Vineyards, and it is located at Tom's Market on E. 19th and Agate twice a week. For more information, visit: baconnation.co/Home.html.

(ABOVE) BRET FORD SPORTING BACON (BELOW) GOLDEN BROWN DELICIOUSNESS, 'GBD'

