



PHOTO BY TODD COOPER

GREASY GOODNESS

Gambino's Hut slings mighty-fine
cheesesteaks BY MATTHEW DENIS

There are few more primal smells that beckon a man to a meal than food fired in black metal. “We still only use cast-iron skillets for sandwiches,” Chris Edge, co-owner of Gambino's Hut, says.

Edge and his wife Heather opened Gambino's Hut on a whim just 10 months ago. What started as a part-time, what-the-hell gig blew up into a business too small to handle the demand.

“We're opening up a new location on Main Street in Springfield,” Edge says. “The kitchen there is about as big as the whole hut.”

The rabid taste for the restaurant's greasy goodness is due to quality and good sense. “Most cheesesteak places use frozen steak, but we get ours fresh from Fulton [Provision Company] and slice it daily,” Edge says.

Edge's travels as a former poker pro produced a distinct taste for excellence. “We still travel a lot. And when

we do, we eat at the best restaurants and find the best cheesesteaks.”

The first Gambino's was in Columbia, South Carolina, 18 years ago. “As a single dad, I had to sell the business to take care of my boys,” Edge says.

Edge brings this familial care to Gambino's — he provided free cheesesteaks for exhausted wildland firefighters and veterans this summer. And, he adds, “late nights we deliver to 24-hour care centers and nursing homes. It gives people something to look forward to. Last Friday night, a driver stayed talking to a resident for over an hour.”

The smile never leaves Edge's face. He's proud of the place and, judging by the cheesesteak coming my way, it's justified. A melted mix of American and Swiss nestles between steak and veggies roasted in secret spices. The authentic Amoroso roll wraps fillings in pillowy goodness.

The onion rings are crunchy, thick and irresistible

dipped in Sriracha and Gambino's homemade ranch. The Bonnie & Clyde's Baked Goods chocolate cupcake on the side seems almost too decadent. Almost.

Edge's brother Russell brings out yellow barbecue sauce from the kitchen. “You can't leave without trying the homemade sauce,” he challenges.

“Oh yeah?”

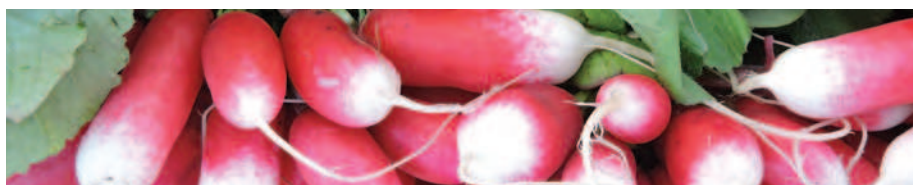
“Yeah, this is the stuff.”

I dip an onion ring. The sauce has a tangy pop, equal parts mustard and sweet under a vinegar base.

“In South Carolina, barbecue sauce is the third thing you're taught,” Russell Edge says. “That comes right after making sweet iced tea and how to care for cast iron.”

Yep, that's the stuff. ■

Gambino's Hut is open seven days a week from 11 am to 2 am at 603 W. Centennial Boulevard, Springfield. For more information, visit gambinoshut.com. For deals and coupons, visit the Gambino's Hut Facebook page.



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