

# MOUTH OF THE COLUMBIA

Coast Weekend's local  
restaurant review

## Beef is king at Hammond's Buoy 9

Review and photos by  
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"Over 70 tons served," boasts Buoy 9's menu of their flagship prime rib.

That begs for a little math.

There are 2,000 pounds in a ton. So 70 tons equals 140,000 pounds. Buoy 9's 16- to-17-ounce "King Cut" — the largest of three prime rib offerings — is essentially a pound. The "Petite" runs about 8 or 8 ounces. Therefore the restaurant claims to have served somewhere between 140,000 and 240,000 prime rib dishes, if my back-of-the-envelope calculations are correct. That's the rib meat from over 3,600 cows.

Where's the beef, indeed.

And who knows how old that menu is? Perhaps a few tons have been served since.

Regardless of my (possibly wonky) math, it's no stretch to say that beef rules at Buoy 9. Besides prime rib, the Hammond restaurant and bar offers New York steaks, burgers, French dips, patty melts, reubens, meatloaf and more. On my trips there were beefy specials, too, like chicken-fried steak and filet mignon.

While finding truckloads of red meat in this creaky, blue-collar joint was hardly shocking, some of the price points were. To be sure, steaks — and particularly rib cuts — are expensive. Nonetheless, I wasn't expecting to find a significant portion of the dinner menu at this funky hole-in-the-wall to run up in the \$20-to-\$30 range.

But that's Buoy 9 — a vanishing relic and stalwart in a changing world. (If Trump supporters are a mystery to you and you know none, Buoy 9 is a fine place to start reaching out.) Despite its age and to its credit, the bar is hardly dingy — just old. Wooden slat walls and exposed ceilings resemble a 1960s basement bar. It's dotted with Wide World of Sports-styled memorabilia, a few coastal references and cheeky quips, including a sprawling sign above the

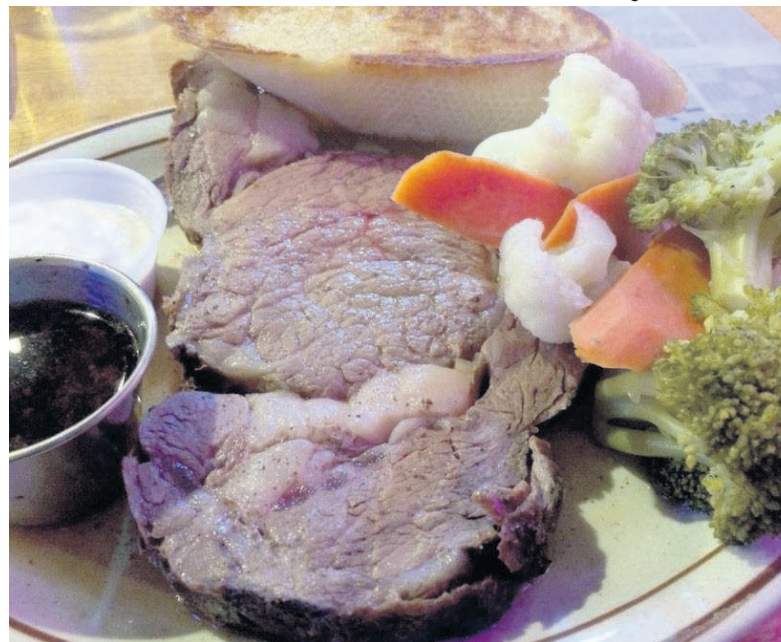
bar that reads: "QUITYERBELLY-ACHIN."

In a lot of ways, Buoy 9 reminds me of the Sea Breeze, which is at the junction of Highways 26 and 101. They're similar in vibe, decor and menu — throwbacks across the board. They're both maintained, likely, by congruent factors: location, locals, gambling and so on. Besides the bar, their meat and potatoes are, well, meat and potatoes. Buoy 9 focuses more on the big cuts of beef, while its South County counterpart offers more bang for the buck.

On account of a winter storm warning — one that never really materialized — my first visit found Buoy 9 rather vacant. One could hear a pin drop if not for Thursday Night Football on the TV. For reasons I can't quite explain I opted for the daily special: chicken-fried steak (\$16.95). As all the dinners do, it came with choice of soup, chowder or salad, as well as mashed potatoes, fries or rice. I chose salad, and added a cup of soup (\$4). The soup of the day, which the server described "like a stuffed pepper," came in a vessel about the size of a teacup. The simple, greasy, beefy broth wasn't quite hot enough. It was chunky with rice, ground beef and a few slivers of bell pepper and onion.

Then came the salad, reminiscent of a time when people were delivered salads when the last thing they wanted to eat was vegetables. It was mostly iceberg lettuce, watery and approaching expiration, plus a few out-of-season tomatoes, chunky white mushrooms, olives, carrot spears and a cup full of dressing nearly the size of the cup of soup.

Based on either flavor or nutrition, the salad failed to justify its own existence.



The petite cut of prime rib at Buoy 9 was plenty of beef.

The main course arrived with mashed potatoes, slathered in salty, flour-y gravy and a large piece of sourdough bread, buttered on both sides. The chicken-fried steak, while pummeled like chewy rubber with a peppery breading, mimicked its namesake rather well. If nothing else, it was a lot of food.

The burger, though, underwhelmed. I chose the 1/3-pound version (\$7.95) over the 1/4-pound. (\$6.95). While appropriately seasoned, the patty was flatter and wider than I anticipated. Dressed with loads of pickles, raw onions, a large leaf of lettuce and more cranky tomatoes,

it was reminiscent of the drive-thru variety — one you've had before. Served a la carte it was a poor value proposition. In this bygone beef temple, I was perplexed at the burger-as-afterthought.

The price and portion of halibut

fish and chips (\$13.95), though, was downright offensive. The two pieces of patently mediocre, beer-battered whitefish were jaw-droppingly minuscule, together the size of a wallet. (To be clear: a *folded* wallet.) I couldn't believe it. The flavor was almost as underwhelming as the portion, the crust alternatively crunchy or oily soft.

My second trip to Buoy 9, on a Saturday evening, found a more lively atmosphere — multiple tables catching up over drinks, enjoying heaping plates, strewn about the bar and restaurant side. Despite the fish and chips debacle, I enjoyed the jovial service and unpretentiousness. I can imagine regulars being highly devoted.

My waiter suggested the bacon-wrapped filet mignon special. "It's the only steak here that I don't use sauce on," he said. "It's so flavorful."

But I had to try the prime rib (available in the winter months Friday through Sunday and every day in summer). I went with the 8-or-9-ounce petite cut (\$23.95) because a half-pound of beef is plenty, along with chowder and steamed veggies.

### BUOY 9

Rating: ★★

996 Pacific Drive, Hammond

PHONE: 503-861-2962

HOURS: Monday-Friday 11 a.m.-9 p.m., Saturday-Sunday 7 a.m.-9 p.m.

PRICE: \$\$ — looks like a dive but ain't priced like one.

VEGETARIAN/VEGAN OPTIONS: Beef is king.

SERVICE: Young, spirited and attentive

DRINKS: Full bar

#### KEY TO STAR RATING SYSTEM

- ★ Poor
- ★★ Below average
- ★★★ Good
- ★★★★ Excellent
- ★★★★★ Best in region

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The chowder was salty, buttery, floury and full of bacon. For a moment I thought it might be bacon chowder, rather than clam (which isn't the worst idea). There were a few little gummy clams, though. The vegetables — broccoli, cauliflower and carrots — were disasters of both sourcing and preparation. Freakishly large, overly modified, they were steamed to oblivion, lifeless and flavorless.

The prime rib was prepared, thankfully, with more care. Pink throughout, the almost foot-print-sized hunk of meat was supple, its juices pooling on the plate. Despite a couple rivers of fat and connective tissue, there was plenty of flesh, most of it thick as an inch or more. It was worth finishing, though not exquisite enough to preclude dunking in the ramekins of watery horseradish and salty au jus. Accompaniments aside, the prime rib itself was easily the best thing I had at Buoy 9.

Good enough to sell 70 tons worth? Or to pay almost \$25 for? Well, tell me how long Buoy 9 has been in business, and I'll get out my calculator ...