

LET'S EAT

## Follow your nose to Madison's new City Barbeque, where samplers are the thing

By Victoria Davis, Special to the Cap Times

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The Judge's Maurice Sampler "Mo" comes with Jackson a quarter grills while chicken, a Matt half slab of Bettschart ribs, pulled plates food pork, beef at City brisket, Barbeque at two pieces 7015 Sligo Drive. cornbread, RUTHIE Texas toast HAUGE and a choice of two side dishes (baked beans with brisket and corn pudding pictured) at City Barbeque, a new restaurant located on the west side of Madison at 7015 Sligo Drive. RUTHIE HAUGE

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The sights, sounds and smells of frying, sizzling, toasting and smoking entices customers into the doors of City Barbeque. One of the first things they'll see, aside from signs reading "God bless brisket" and "Wisdom served 8 oz at a time," is the restaurant's large, silver smoker, stacked with eight slabs of ribs, eight half chickens and a turkey.

"It depends on the day," said Matt Bettschart, the general manager of Madison's new City Barbeque location, which opened just this past April on Sligo Drive, next to MOD Pizza. "Different days, different amounts in the smoker."

The rich aroma of cooked meat is apparent even through a mask, "which is saying something," Bettschart said. "We do like to let our meats speak for themselves."

City Barbecue's smokers run 24 hours a day, seven days a week, cooking upwards of 40 racks of ribs, 20 pounds of turkey, 50 pounds of chicken, 100 pounds of

brisket and another 100 pounds of pork each day. The ribs, turkey and chicken get cycled through the smoker three times a day, while brisket and pork cook overnight.

That's why the warm scents that permeate throughout City Barbecue never cease. It even makes the staff hungry.

"You'd think that with most things you're around all day, you wouldn't want to eat it," said Bettschart. "But this stuff is always something that we look forward to eating. When you come in, you should always feel like you're getting a fresh product."



*Matt Bettschart adds wood to the smoker at City Barbeque in Madison.*  
RUTHIE HAUGE



*A hickory-smoked quarter chicken is served with Texas toast at City Barbeque, a new location of a chain restaurant at 7015 Sligo Drive.*  
RUTHIE HAUGE


### **Backyard hospitality**

Madison's location of City Barbeque is among the newest of 52, spread out all over the United States. Bettschart started with the Ohio-based barbecue chain last November, trained staff in the Chicago and Indianapolis locations, and eventually brought the franchise north.

Bettschart has been in the restaurant business for close to 20 years, having worked at other Madison eateries such as Babes Grill & Bar and Biaggi's. This is his first experience working with barbecue.

"It's also my first time being in fast-casual," said Bettschart. "Culture and community plays a big role for us. The way that everybody works with the food, is passionate about the food, is passionate about the customers, certainly was a big draw for me."





A 3-cheese baked mac, peach cobbler, the Judge's Sampler, ribs and the More Cowbell sandwich sit on a table at City Barbeque at 7015 Sligo Drive.

RUTHIE HAUGE

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The company talks a lot about “backyard hospitality,” he said.

“If you’re having a picnic in your backyard, how do you want people to feel? How you want people to feel when they come over to have food at your house is how we like to treat people here.”

It’s a very generous picnic. In addition to standard ribs and chicken orders, which can be purchased by the pound, City Barbeque offers five samplers and eleven different sandwiches. These are piled high with pork, brisket, turkey, chicken and more, served between two toasty buns or Texas toast.

One of the most popular orders is the Judge’s Sampler (\$34.99), which serves two and features a quarter chicken, half slab of ribs, pulled pork, beef brisket, two sides, two pieces of cornbread and two pieces of Texas toast. The More Cowbell sandwich (\$8.99) tops beef brisket with provolone cheese, sautéed peppers, fried onions and horseradish sauce.



More Cowbell is a sandwich of beef brisket, provolone, sautéed peppers and onions, crispy fried onions, and horseradish sauce, served on Texas toast. City Barbeque is a new location of a chain restaurant, located on the west side of Madison at 7015 Sligo Drive.

RUTHIE HAUGE

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Bettschart’s personal favorite is the smoked turkey sandwich (\$7.49), simply rubbed with salt and pepper. “It’s sweet and succulent,” he said.

Families or groups feeling brave can order The Motherload (\$74.99), which feeds up to six people. That meal includes a choice among six of City Barbeque’s 14 sides, from baked beans with brisket to fried pickles, hush puppies, corn pudding and more.

“All of our sides are made fresh every day, in house, from scratch,” said Bettschart. “It’s something we like to make known since it can be deceiving when you see sides served in a paper cup.”

### **Right off the line**

With so many meats and sides made fresh each day, it’s no surprise that City Barbeque’s goal is to sell out their meats — at their best for about four hours — each day.

“We don’t lose much in quality if the meat sits out for a bit,” said Bettschart. “You’ll still get great flavor, but it’s really amazing when you get it right off the line onto a plate. It’s just phenomenal.”



*Matt Bettschart carves a smoked brisket at City Barbeque.*  
RUTHIE HAUGE

For the meats that don't sell out, City Barbeque freezes leftovers to donate to Little John's Kitchens, a food-focused nonprofit in Fitchburg that works with "rescued" ingredients.

For the holidays, City Barbeque is packing up whole turkeys and turkey breasts, as well as smoked bone-in-hams, with "all the sides and fixings," ready to go out the door on Thanksgiving and before Christmas. Quantity is limited; customers must call or visit to order their holiday meal.

"We're really trying to get the word and the name of City Barbeque out to Madison," said Bettschart. "We still get people in here every single day being like, 'When did you open? We didn't even know you were here.'"

"But we work hard, and we're having fun doing it," Bettschart added. "And we have great feedback from our guests, which is super awesome. We've got some good regulars coming back as well. And they're coming from miles and miles away. It's kind of crazy."

Of all the many barbecue-loving signs in City Barbeque, Bettschart has a favorite: "Doing things the hard way since 1999."

"It really is a craft," he said. "Good food and good barbecue takes a lot of time and a lot of effort. That's what this all boils down to."

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