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Bouchard enjoys Papa Don's fresh, broasted chicken

BY TOM WILKOWSKE
NEWS TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

On her first visit to Papa Don's Restaurant, Leila Bouchard remembers the friendly waitress as much as she remembers the broasted chicken and what a good deal it was.

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Bouchard hasn't seen that waitress again in the six months or so she's been going to Papa Don's. That may be because she first dined in the back dining room, which allows smoking, before switching to the front one, which doesn't.

NICE FOOD, NICE STAFF

"That lady was so nice, she invited us to come back again on a night she was working," Bouchard recalled. "She said everything here is homemade."

We took our seats at a booth in the sunny front dining area of Papa Don's, which is located on the main floor of Superior's Androy Hotel. A waitress hustled out within a minute or two to take our orders and pour me a cup of coffee.

Bouchard and her husband, Jerome, dine out occasionally but don't travel far and wide just for a meal. With a few exceptions, they tend to eat where they are. They like Gronk's Grill & Bar in Superior's Itasca neighborhood. "They have fabulous burgers," she said. And Grand Casino Hinckley has a mean Oriental chicken salad, she added.

Bouchard surveyed her order when it came out. "Look at how much you get," she said, pointing to the full plate. She sampled the chicken, proclaiming it good. "I love it because it's so crispy. And they use good chicken that's not just a lot of skin and bone," she said.

TOM'S TAKE

Papa Don's broasted chicken tasted exactly like the stuff I used to make when I worked at my local pizza parlor in high school. There's a reason for that.



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It turns out "broasted" is a registered trademark of the Broaster Co. of Beloit, Wis., which makes and sells specialized equipment to marinate and cook the chicken.

And how is it cooked? Sounds like some combination "broiled" and "roasted," right? No, it's deep fried in a pressure cooker. The manufacturer claims the pressure seals in the juices and seals out the oil; pressure also shortens cooking time, meaning you're more likely to get a fresh batch of broasted chicken. (The marinating is also done under pressure, as I recall.)

The breading is a bit thinner than you might find on fast-food chicken and the flavor seems to permeate the meat, which was of a good quality. And the portion at Papa Don's was indeed generous. I considered bringing the breast home with me, then reconsidered -- I'd had only a peanut butter sandwich for breakfast, after all.

When I ordered American fries, I thought I'd be getting the large, chunky skin-on version of french fries. Papa Don's American fries are essentially diced potatoes fried up crispy -- good, but not what I was expecting.

The roll and vegetable -- cooked corn -- were there to round out the meal but didn't add much to it. Then again, this meal is all about the chicken.

ABOUT THE DISH, RESTAURANT

Papa Don's owner Don Mains said his restaurant uses the Broaster Co. process. Rather than innovating with the ingredients or technique, the key to good chicken is to keep batches coming out regularly so it's served piping hot to customers.

Papa Don's is known for its pies, which Don's twin sister, Donna, makes several times a week. There are 13 flavors, including apple, blueberry, cherry, banana cream, peach, strawberry and chocolate, as well as silk fruit versions.

Mains also said his 50-item Sunday brunch buffet (11 a.m. to 4 p.m.) has become popular. It costs \$10 for adults, \$7 for senior citizen, and \$5 for ages 4-9. It's free for younger kids.

TOM WILKOWSKE is food reviewer and copy editor for the Wave. Reach him at (218) 723-5396 or by e-mail at atablefortwo@duluthnews.com.

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