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St. Louis fixture for meats, catering and takeout dinners

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Mateker's Meat and Catering, a St. Louis fixture for more than five decades, is a fine butcher shop, a catering business and a takeout operation. I was there to pick up a takeout dinner, specifically the Broasted chicken.

I've loved this juicy, pressure-cooked version of fried chicken since my parents began bringing it home in the late 1950s. In the intervening years, a roadside sign for Broasted chicken prompted a pullover more often than not.

Today, the Broaster Co. has placed its patented pressure-cooking Broaster units in businesses across the country. The machine resembles a top-loading washing machine with a hand-cranked latch.

What made the experience at Mateker's memorable was the step back in time to hands-on butchering. Mateker's has a fresh-meat case that runs the length of the store, perhaps 40 or 50 feet. The shop sells Black Angus-brand beef by the cut or by quarter or half cow. In addition, the butchers dress hundreds of hunters' deer and elk every year.

More importantly for those who appreciate the convenience of carryout, Mateker's varies its menu of hot foods daily. It also offers a large selection of sandwiches, barbecue and hot and cold side dishes. A large selection of cooked and frozen foods also is available.

I ordered the eight-piece Broasted chicken family meal (\$12.49), which came with biscuits and a choice of two sides. The food was great. The chicken was juicy — even the breast, which dries out easily — and the light golden brown coating was crisp and appetizing. I selected baked beans and sweet-and-sour coleslaw for the side orders. The beans were sweet and tasty, though they had to be reheated at home. The slaw was delightful.

Mateker's is open from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday and from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Sunday.

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