

EVERYONE JUST CALLS IT THE “BT”



When a popular business has been around for as long as the Beaverton Tavern, you can understand why most people just refer to it by its initials. When it becomes a destination, as in “we’re going to the BT for dinner,” most people for 50 miles in any direction know where you’re headed. It helps to have great food...and they do.

The “they” at the BT are owner Steve Brubaker and his sister Lori Grove. Steve has been showing up for work at the BT for 28 years now and Lori, serving as General Manger, has worked for her big brother for over 8 years.

It wasn’t always an eating establishment but rather a ‘shot & beer’ bar for most of the last century. Right around the time that Beaverton became a city (1903) the new business took hold in the vicinity of the northwest corner of Ross and Brown streets. The stories those walls could tell remained mostly local until Steve and his partner Dennis Perry took over the business in June 1981.

Beaverton is lucky that fate intervened because while growing up in Brubaker land on M-18 south of town, Steve never envisioned being an

entrepreneur in his hometown. The fear of the infamous draft lottery took him away the first time.

“After high school, I had visions of becoming a jungle grunt in the Army if I drew a low number,” said Brubaker. “So like a fool I enlisted in the Air Force before my number was drawn and of course, it was up in the 300’s (laughing!)”

Upon his return after four years (never getting to the jungles of Vietnam), unemployment in the area forced Steve to head west. He and his good friend Dennis took up residence on the beaches of southern California and set out to make their fortunes.

“I started driving truck for a moving company, bought some real estate and was living in the fast lane,” admitted Steve. “After eight years, I needed to get out or my lifestyle was going to kill me. So Dennis and I decided to come back to Michigan and look for a bar/restaurant to buy.”

“We came within an eyelash of buying a place in the Traverse City area when Lloyd Broka offered to sell us the BT.”

Lori was a stay-at-home girl. She married her high school sweetheart and went to work for the schools in the kitchen and eventually the classroom. Then she ran a gift shop and marketed her hand-painted projects at craft shows.

“When growing up Steve and I weren’t close because of our age difference, him going into the service and then moving to California. The whole family was glad when “big brother” moved back home,” Lori recalled. “I always looked up to him...still do, but we really complement each other working at the BT.”

The idea of adding Mexican food came about from Steve’s days in California. “We loved the Mexican food out west and when we came back here there wasn’t any Chi Chi’s or Taco Bells or really any good Mexican food restaurants in the area. So we started expanding and adding to the menu,” Steve said.

From three employees in the early Brubaker/Perry days to over 30 employees now, the BT didn’t become a destination without a lot of hard work. For many years, Steve would bartend the day shift and Dennis took the nights for a week. Then they would switch shifts the next week.

They sold the business after almost 20 years of serving the locals. The deal eventually didn’t work out but Dennis had already moved to

Montana so Steve made the decision to buy his partner out and Lori came in to help.

Most people remember the TV show Cheers, which was about a local bar/restaurant where everyone knew your name. Steve and Lori admit they serve so many out-of-towners now that it's great to see some of the regulars come in...they still remember those names.

ROR: When did the BT go from a shot & beer to margaritas and burritos?

Steve: We needed to get into the restaurant business really because the drinking laws got real strict in the mid-80's and we wanted to expand. My wife Jodi was the only cook back in the kitchen for years. She started the Mexican theme in 1987.

Lori: The menu has a large variety now and we keep changing, trying new things. We're known for the Mexican food but we've also got broasted chicken, pizza and prime rib.

ROR: What's the biggest myth or misunderstanding about the BT?

Steve: It's name, the Beaverton Tavern, is misleading. We're not a bar but rather a restaurant that serves cocktails with a meal.

Lori: We still hear about people who don't want to go into a bar to eat. Some people will actually wait for a table to open up on the west side or others want to be served on the bar side because they like the atmosphere over here better. We try to please everyone.

ROR: What's your favorite meal?

Steve: All our food is great...right? (absolutely!) Seriously, I love our homemade soups and I'm not saying that just because I make'em.

Lori: I love the broasted chicken. That's my favorite. But I like the nachos too. It's really hard to pick.

ROR: How do you keep the employees motivated?

Lori: We try to keep things new and fresh and we try to make the work environment friendly. But we do have a big menu and it's hard work. We have appreciative clientele and the tips are good, which also helps.

Steve: We've been lucky to have employees stay with us for years. Some have been with us for over 20 years. Everyone knows his or her job. They open the doors in the morning, turn on the lights and go to work.

ROR: Steve, I want you to describe Lori and Lori, you describe Steve.

Steve: She's the General Manager but really she's the General (laughing). She's family and she really saved me. She's a lot like our mother...take barely nothing and turn it into dinner.

Lori: Steve can make friends with ANYONE. He doesn't give himself enough credit for making this business work, especially when he'd give you the shirt off his back if he believed in you. But he works hard because he worries about the employees more than he does himself.

ROR: Can you share a few humorous events?

Lori: Well, there was a guy who came in for a meal one night and didn't realize until he got up to go to the restroom that he'd forgotten to put his pants on...just had his long johns on and he wasn't even drinking!

ROR: Can you think of any celebrities that have been in here?

Steve: Practically every politician from around here has been in...I think to eat rather than try to get votes (laughing). The Howe's have brought in some big name NASCAR people like Rusty Wallace. I'm sure there have been quite a few we never knew were here.

Lori: It is funny to hear people talking about the BT. I was in a restaurant in Tennessee one time and overheard some people talking about this great Mexican restaurant in Beaverton, Michigan. They were saying 'you wouldn't believe the burritos they serve.'

ROR: Ok, one of your big promotions is the BT 7 lb. burrito. Has anyone actually sat down and ate one of those things?

Steve: You wouldn't believe how many of those things we sell and I've personally witnessed quite a few people sit right there and eat the whole thing. Most of the time it's for a table of four.

Lori: We actually had one man eat two of them. He got up and walked out but we never did hear if he survived.

ROR: What was your best promotion and worst?

Steve: The best was the turtle races we used to do on the 4th of July. We eventually had to stop because it was getting crazy and the liability got too high. The worst was probably our homemade ice cream. It was great ice cream but this really isn't a good location parking wise to stop in for an ice cream. Also I was spending all my time down in the

basement cranking on that damn ice cream maker and the employees were eating most of the product!

ROR: I understand you've got a new business venture coming?

Steve: Yeah, we're excited about marketing some to our food products: the bulk soups, the chips and some light bakery items. We're in over 30 locations so far. I can't tend bar forever and looking to slow down a bit.

Lori: The business is called Beaverton Tavern Food Products and we've got a small production location on M-18. It's just a way of expanding on what people already like and are asking for.

ROR: I like the idea because I'm one of those people that already likes your food. But stick around a while longer because I also like the idea that you already know my name. Hey Steve, hey Lori...HEY RICK, welcome back to the BT!