

RESTAURANT REVIEW

# Virginia Barbeque

## The Best-Tasting Barbeque in Town

BY ANNE JONES

IT WAS EXACTLY ONE YEAR ago that Betsy and Bo Dabney's daughter was born. Betsy's mother brought over a barbeque dinner to help out, and we should all thank her profusely. After one taste, the Dabneys decided that the meal from Virginia Barbeque in Ashland was the best barbeque they had ever tasted in their whole barbeque-filled lives, and the rest is history. Two months ago they opened up their own franchise in Lakeside, and what they serve is, in fact, the best barbeque in town.

When you mention barbeque around here, the question of its origin invariably comes up. Then there has to be the tedious discussion about whether its North Carolina-style or Southern or Virginian or Texan—and which one is better and why. No need to worry about all that at Virginia Barbeque. They have it all, they're clear about what's what, and they do it right. Their "original Virginia" barbeque sandwich is hand-pulled pork with a tomato-based sauce; the "classic North Carolina" barbeque is pork with a sauce that is vinegar-based, because, as the menu says, "North Carolina folks would never put none of that red stuff on no BBQ." Then there's the Texas BBQ beef sandwich, made from wood smoked beef brisket. Rotisserie chicken barbeque, St. Louis smoked slab of ribs, and an all-beef hot dog are the other meal choices.

H. is a North Carolina barbeque kinda guy—so he went with the sandwich (with cole slaw, of course), hush puppies and collard greens. It was the best barbeque he's ever tasted. Period. Fresh and delicate are not words that usually come to mind to describe such a meal—but that's what it was. The collard greens were slow-cooked and seasoned well, but not over-cooked to a mush. Similarly, the hush puppies were crispy on the outside, moist and delicious on the inside, and the slaw was shredded and crisp.

My chicken barbeque sandwich was equally as extraordinary. The chicken was absolutely perfect—moist, pristine, white, white breast meat without even the faintest threat of gristle or mysterious darkness. The drizzled-on sauce was Virginia style tomato-based, and wonderful. I've never had better chicken barbeque in my life, nothing's even



Betsy Dabney is ready to serve the best barbeque in town.

come close.

What makes all their barbeque so distinctive is this: the high quality, cooked-to-perfection meats and the deliciously seasoned sauces seem to be gently tossed together so that both flavors are independently enjoyable. It's not all thrown together and overcooked in a pot until it's just a drippy mess waiting to be sopped up by the bun. But if you do like your sauce to show your meat who's boss, there are at least 11 bottles of special sauces to choose from at the counter. They have names like "Death Sauce" and "Kiss Your Ass Goodbye." I stayed clear of all that and just enjoyed my delightful chicken barbeque sandwich, cole slaw and baked beans.

Virginia Barbeque is mostly an efficient take-out place, though the surroundings are attractive and clean, and the five or six nice tables offer a pleasant place to sit down and eat. They don't serve beer and they close at 7:00 pm (but summer hours may go till 8:00). You won't find pictures of adorable little pink baby pigs in gingham bonnets (thank goodness) or NASCAR memorabilia (thank double goodness) on the walls. You will find the best-tasting barbeque you've ever had. ☐

Virginia Barbeque  
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