

DINING

Good food hunting at Big Buck in Auburn Hills

BY ELEANOR HEALD
SPECIAL WRITER

Using the same marketing strategy that makes its Gaylor location visible to travelers on I-75, Big Buck Brewery & Steakhouse can now be seen from I-75 along the Auburn Hills stretch. The lodge-style Big Buck has been attracting crowds hunting for good eats since opening October 1.

"What we do best is not rocket science," Marketing Manager Bill Wishart maintained. "We serve great steaks and great beer brewed on premise."

Explained clearly on the menu, here's what Big Buck says about its beer.

"Big Buck is proud to have been selected by Excel Corporation to serve the finest beef in the Midwest, Sterling Silver Certified Premium U.S.D.A. Choice, grain-fed Midwestern beef. Never frozen, your steak is charbroiled to your specification with Big Buck's house blend of spices presented to you with our guarantee that your beef entree will be tender, juicy and flavorful."

The Detroit-metro area has become a steakhouse port-of-call with each establishment touting its "special" beef.

"We're guaranteeing a diner's 100 percent satisfaction with our steaks or your money back; no questions," Wishart emphasized. So, if you aren't satisfied, speak up! All steaks are served with choice of soup or salad, choice of potato (baked, red skins, smashed or steak fries) and dinner bread.

Brewmaster Scott Graham handcrafts 10 beers in Big Buck's state-of-the-art brewing facility.

"Volume-wise, lighter beers are the favorites, including Buck Naked Light, flagship top-seller Big Buck and Raspberry Wheat," Graham noted. "But there's no accounting for individual tastes, that's why we brew 10."

And what does this 31-year-old brewmaster like best from the Big Buck menu? "My favorite match is the Sterling Silver 9-ounce filet with Doc's E.S.B. (Extra Special Bitter)," he responded without hesitation.

Big Buck

Where: 2550 Takata Drive, Auburn Hills (248) 276-2337. Opdyke and University are nearest major cross streets.

Hours: Monday through Saturday 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. with bar until 1 a.m.; Sunday, noon to 10 p.m.

Menu: Beef and brews are prime focus, but there are great starters, sandwiches, burgers, ribs, fish, chicken and pasta plus some killer desserts.

Cost: Starters \$2.30-7; sandwiches and burgers \$5.25-9; steaks depending on cut and weight \$13-25; other specials \$10-16; desserts \$4. Reservations: For groups of 16 or larger only. Credit cards: All majors accepted.

With this brew plus Antler and Redbird ales, Graham snagged silver medals earlier this year at the World Beer Championships in Chicago.

Proving Graham's point about the broad spectrum of personal preferences was Blake Kirby of Troy, out with a business lunch party of six. Kirby became a regular in the first nine-days Big Buck was open.

"I like the Redbird ale because I prefer red ales and this one is different from the usual," he said. Redbird Ale has a reddish-copper appearance, is medium-bodied and medium bodied. Kirby already had his food favorites pegged as the BBQ Beef Brisket sandwich or as the menu section tags "S.O.B." for Stuff on Bread and the Hunter-Style Grilled Meatloaf.

In the lunch group with Kirby were Mary Bull of Rochester Hills and Gerri Ruffing of Auburn Hills who praised the Raspberry Wheat beer and were trying it with the Cajun Chicken Salad to spice up the rest of their day.

Executive Chef George Syer,



Crowd pleasers: Executive Chef George Syer (left) oversees the kitchen crew, while Brewmaster Scott Graham handcrafts beers in Big Buck's state-of-the-art brewing facility.



STAFF PHOTOS BY JOHN STORMZANO

Spacious Steakhouse: Big Buck Brewery & Steakhouse has a north woods hunting lodge theme.

formerly an executive chef for Mountain Jack's oversees the kitchen crew who, at lunch particularly, hustle to get dishes to the table in fast order. Young, energetic and well-trained servers are polite, knowledgeable, friendly and accommodating.

"This is the busiest place I've ever worked," general manager Chip Reid said. "It's a blast to be busy."

Game dishes add an unusual touch to the multiple offerings. Great White Buffalo Burger is a half pounder. Smoked Venison Reuben is an awesome twist on the classic and is the most popular S.O.B. Beer Brats are also made from venison.

A Little Buck Menu intended for those 10 years and younger makes the eatery family friendly. Buckaroo Pizza, Buckaroo Burger, Chicken or Fish Antlers come

with steak fries. Soft drinks for kids of all ages include Spiker Rut Beer, Grandma's Vanilla Creme Soda or Rockin' Rolls Black Cherry Soda.

Sweet tooth can choose from among Snickers Pie, Pumpkin Cheesecake or Tiramisu Su. And I had to ask, why a spin on an Italian classic dessert?

"Because we make the best," Wishart responded. "Diners say WOW! to our steaks and we want them to say the same thing at the end of the meal."

In addition to beef and brews for grownups, Big Buck appeals with its north woods hunting lodge theme. The spacious Auburn Hills Big Buck seats 650 and has parking for 300 cars. Layout on two levels with a large percentage of booths reduces perception of size and noise. A group of six or eight can actually have whole-group conversation! Mounted trophy deer racks with

an elk in the center, hand-carved larger-than-life bears and Amish hand-carved wood furniture from Mio, Mich., add visual interest.

Big Buck, the brainchild of Michigan State University grad and Gaylor attorney William Rolinski, opened its first location in Gaylor in May 1995. It was followed up by Grand Rapids in March of this year. The concept developed while Rolinski was in Breckenridge, Colorado on a business trip. He visited a ski country microbrewery and "picked the brains" of the owner. Rolinski added touches of his own.

In June 1996, Michigan Brewery, Inc., the corporate name, went public. A good small cap investment? Ask your broker. More locations in and out-of-state are planned. Good steak and brew at modest prices? No doubt about it.

WHAT'S COOKING

BY ELEANOR & RAY HEALD
SPECIAL WRITERS

■ For the sixth year in a row, Merchant's Fine Wine shop will hold its annual Election Day Single Malt Scotch Tasting complemented by a buffet table at Ferndale's White Heather

Scottish Club, Tuesday, November 4, 1997, 6:30-9:00 p.m. The event has sold out each year. Reservations: (248) 546-7770, \$40 per person.

■ Friday, October 24 at Borders Books, 34300 Woodward in

Birmingham, 7-9 p.m., a pre-release book signing for "Romance Begins in the Kitchen."

It's hosted by Merchant of Vino with whimsical hors d'oeuvres provided by 2 Unique Catering. The book, authored by area

residents Dawn Bause, Modesta DeVita and Nidal Zaher, raises the bar for the art of dining-in.

In this book, DeVita provides culinary artistry with menus and recipes. Bause enhances these with generous portions of romance and Zaher, a certified master sommelier, guides readers to matching wines in a broad range of prices.

■ Gourmet Gala hosted by

Crittendon Hospital, 5-8 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 2 at the Troy Marriott, 200 W. Big Beaver Road, Troy. More than 34 of metro

Detroit's finest chefs, restaurateurs and vintners will be offering tastes of their specialty dishes. Tickets are \$75 (friend); \$125 (patron); and \$175 (benefactor), call (248) 652-5345, 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday-Friday. Event proceeds to go toward the purchase of an EKG Management

System for the hospital's Special Diagnostics department.

■ Wine Tasting Dinner at The Atrium Cafe at DoubleTree Guest Suites Hotel, 850 Tower Drive, Troy, 7:30 p.m. Friday, Nov. 7. Creative cuisine paired with fine French and German wines. The cost is \$65 per person, call (248) 879-6612 for reservations.

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