

A Taste of Town



LAURA BEAHM/Tribune

Top left - The lunch-time crowd fills the dining room at Blue Fork Kitchen on December 22, 2021. Middle left - Their Blue Fork Burger features horseradish aioli, bacon, red onion marmalade, blue cheese crumbles, mixed greens and is paired with fries. Left - Blank Space at Blue Fork Kitchen offers a variety of options for private events.

Comfort food with a twist

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As the creative team behind Blue Fork Kitchen was working on the menu and what the restaurant would become, the desire was to have something for everyone.

Blue Fork Kitchen opened at 3609 Cimarron Plaza on Oct. 1, 2021, by Knife and Fork Concepts — the team that also runs Odyssey at 521 W. Second St.

“We were looking at what can we make that’s approachable; that people are familiar with; that they’ll enjoy but still providing that from scratch aspect like we’re known for at Odyssey,” executive chef Dustin Schmidt said. “We do everything from scratch here, too. It’s the comfort food you might have known growing up, but we’ve put our twist and ingredient changes into them to elevate them a little more to what we’ve been known for, but they are still very approachable.”

Schmidt and the kitchen staff put their

own spin on comfort classics like meatloaf using uncommon ingredients like black garlic in the gravy.

He takes a lot of pride in Blue Fork’s pork schnitzel and herb spaetzle — also in the comfort food portion of the menu.

Schmidt spoke to a Hastings High group, including an exchange student from Germany.

“I was describing the dish, and she said, ‘that’s exactly what it is,’” he said.

That response made him feel good because the schnitzel and spaetzle was a memory of his youth when his mother was stationed in Germany while serving in the U.S. Air Force.

“That’s a dish we remember going off base and eating in restaurants,” he said.

“To hear it’s pretty much spot on from what I remember as a teenager was pretty amazing, but with our little spins on it.”

The Blue Fork menu also has a “build a pasta” feature with six proteins, four kinds of pasta, and four sauces.

Blue Fork plans to have fresh pasta and sauces on the menu



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Sous-chef Alex Gallagher gets plates ready during lunch at Blue Fork Kitchen Dec. 22.

all the time, which ones, however, may be subject to change based on demand.

One of the busiest times of the week for Blue Fork has been brunch, which is 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Sundays.

Blue Fork includes kids menus, a more casual atmosphere, quicker service, and more relatable menu items than Odyssey.

Since opening in January 2016, Odyssey has received catering requests all the time.

“Our kitchen is so small at Odyssey there’s just no way to prepare any of that food and get it out the back door,” said Jamey Hamburger, president of Knife and Fork Concepts. “It’s an older building, and we need every seat for guests

and less square footage for the kitchen to make that economically feasible. We decided because we have the space here, let’s put in more kitchen.”

The Blue Fork kitchen not only has the space for catering requests and the 200-seat dining room, but also the 180-seat Blank Space next door — all at the same time.

“We have a space that can accommodate a small office party for 10-12 people that want a private room, or it can go up to 180 people for a small wedding or rehearsal dinner, all of those sorts of things,” Hamburger said.

Menus for events at Blank Space are customizable.

Setting up on the north side of Hastings at Cimarron Plaza is

advantageous for Blue Fork.

The north side is where the majority of Hastings hotels are and multiple housing developments and the Smith Softball Complex. That location also benefits diners from Grand Island and Kearney who have been driving to Odyssey.

There were requests to open a restaurant similar to Odyssey in one of those other cities.

“We had lots of meetings about what we could do, but there’s just a few of us, so it’s difficult to decide to open another one if you’re not committed,” Hamburger said. “We wanted to do that in Hastings and not in another city. We saw the need in this

community, and those folks are more than happy to drive to us, and we appreciate that.”

The name Blue Fork Kitchen represents the local emphasis.

In planning the restaurant, a group of friends sat around, drinking wine and brainstorming different business aspects.

Someone pulled up the topography map of the county and pointed out that the north fork of the Little Blue River runs through Adams County.

“As that happened, I said, ‘what about Blue Fork Kitchen?’” Schmidt said.

Hamburger asked him to repeat that.

“It got around the table and kind of just stuck,” Schmidt said.

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Blue Fork Kitchen & Blank Space Event Venue

Dine-In, Carry Out, & Catering are available!

Please call 402-303-6816 to schedule your next event.

Email general inquiries to bluefork.kitchen or for private events: events.bluefork@gmail.com

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