

... Falls River closed for good as of February, 2009 but blazed a legendary trail of creating some of the best barbecue this State has ever seen in its brief tenure as what quickly became a true world-famous and world-class BBQ dining venue.

**Review Of Falls River Smokehouse
110 Litchford Village Shopping Center /
8320 Litchford Road
Raleigh, NC 27615**

**Wed ~ Sat 7AM-9PM for
breakfast, lunch & dinner**

Restaurant is closed to the public Sun ~ Tue

**Restaurant is available for private parties Sun ~ Tue
& catering is always available 7 days a week as well , call**

Phone: 919-954-1190

By

H. Kent Craig

Reviewed: May, 2008



Once in the greatest of whiles, a master chef stays under the radar for a long time for their own reasons. They simply might not want the risk of running such a specialty cuisine establishment like a barbecue restaurant, they might be making more money working for someone else than they possibly could "going independent" or in the case of master chef across all venues but simply loves and has nailed barbeque - Vernon Griffin - who owns and props Falls River Smokehouse in north Raleigh N.C., was making a very comfortable living for himself with his private catering business for years and years before deciding, perhaps I should say having "an attack of the insanities", to open his own retail fine-cooked swine flesh sit-down establishment and take all the risks and the headaches as well as possible rewards that go along with it.

Let me cut to the bottom line: Vernon, Mr. Griffin, grew up cooking and has made his living as an adult as a *haute cuisine* chef for others and himself and thankfully for us, has a true talent for cooking 'cue the real, traditional Eastern N.C. way (though he claims that is has a Western-NC influence, if it does I can't find it) and as important as his skills at "the pit" and in the kitchen, takes an enormous amount of pride in what he serves to his customers (as do all great chefs) and knows that he's judged on every single sandwich or barbecue plate every time by every single customer and it is pride, no, more than that, it is his *mission* to make every bite not just a satisfying one but a truly memorable one and durn'd if he doesn't do it. Only once have I rated a new establishment "4-pig" best-of-the-best right out of the gate (that was Smokey Bones) without having a years-long track record of consistently superb fare and I don't hesitate to say one iota that Vernon Griffin and Falls River Smokehouse deserve it.

His pork 'cue is a true, very traditional Eastern-NC-Style cooked with real hickory wood inside a "very unique cooker" (see photos at the bottom of this review) of his own "design" but guess what, it not only works but works as well or better than any other way of 12-hour-plus slow-cooking the meat in any other style of cooker. It is not chopped at all, a knife or cleaver doesn't touch it, is pulled-pork but is so finely and well, am running out of adjectives, just perfectly pulled into smallish shreds as to make picking up the right amount on your fork a no-brainer, just stab and eat and eat well, friend, eat it well. The sauce is very light vinegar-based and of course, being the traditionalist that he is, while he does offer his own house red pepper sauce he also has bottles of Texas Pete handy for those who prefer a slightly more mild sauce. The meat itself is groomed to remove all fat globules and all burned pieces and anything else that you wouldn't want to put into your mouth let alone chew and the result is a very consistent blend of short and long pulled pieces to make just chowing down quite enjoyable.

His Texas-style beef barbecue is slow-cooked over live hickory coals just like his pork and served thinly sliced without sauce on it so you can add his own dark brown house sauce for the beef as you wish and together (or separately for that matter) they are equal to very best I've ever eaten in Texas or anywhere else for that matter (and yes, his brisket is better to me than the local Q-Shack establishment as much as I like theirs when I'm in Durham). Not wanting to bore you with thesaurus words in trying to describe how superlative both his beef-critter and pork-critter 'cues are, let's just say the quality of both defines what it means to be best-of-the-best.

The one thing that might surprise you considering how truly "old guard" Falls River Smokehouse is, is that they don't offer hushpuppies. When I asked Vernon about this, about why he doesn't, he replied honestly that it was a matter of "insurance", that if they had a deep-fat fryer in his kitchen his insurance rates would be 25% more than what he's paying now. What he offers in its stead is a very traditional "cracklin' cornbread" muffin and keeping in

mind I don't normally like "cracklings" (cooked fat nodules from the skin of the hog) in anything I eat, his muffins are and without any hyperbole equal to my dearly departed Grandmother Craig's that she made literally for decades and raised eleven hungry children on and which I have the fondest memories of when we would go visit her and Granddaddy/Rev. Major Craig in their ancestral home in Wilkes County N.C. in the high Appalachian Mountains and Vernon's cornbread (muffins) are so close to those memories as to bring forth a truly emotional response.

That's what barbecue of any sort is, anyway . . . it's not food, it's not culture, it's not religion and it's not an excuse for your cardiologist to fuss at you . . . barbeque is always about touching deeply emotional places within our soul of hearth and home and family and memories of happy times with all of the above by use of the touchstone of multiple sensory inputs to wellspring forth a safe place we can always return to and it's special places like Falls River Smokehouse that are the vehicle for that.

A couple of other things to mention . . . first, they claim to have "the world's best Brunswick stew" . . . while, yes, the recipe was handed down to Vernon from his great-grandmother to him to carry on, he knows I respectfully disagree that it's "the world's best", it's a little thin (I like my base sauce somewhat thick) and has everything out of the kitchen but the kitchen sink in it, not just pork and vegetables but also beef and chicken and green beans which I have a hard time digesting and, well, it shows that reasonable men can respectfully disagree on cuisine specifics, you may indeed find it to be "4-stew"-rated while I don't . . . second, you simply *have* to try their "Krispy Kreme Bread Pudding" which is made from, I kid you not, actual Krispy Kreme donuts and a few small chocolate chips and is glazed in a light lemon sauce . . . while I don't normally like bread pudding, it's usually without a distinctive taste to me, Mr. Griffin's bread pudding made is simply, pardon my slightly risqué forwardness, sex on a plate, an eatable orgasm that you stick a fork in to wolf it down before you realize you've eaten "the whole thing" which I do knowing all the while that I'm risking irritating my damaged pancreas and possibly winding up in the hospital, it is *that* good and words trying to describe its unique flavors don't do it justice . . . perhaps without his meaning to, this Krispy Kreme-based dessert ("the second best way to enjoy Krispy Kreme donuts" as how he phrases it) has become his signature dish and you really do need to order a slice when you go there.

Post Script: my wife also asked me to mention that their ribs are also "4-pig", are to die for, like you'd expect anything else but that from them, Smile.



Vernon Griffin, Master Chef & Owner & Proprietor Of Falls River Smokehouse



A plate of their perfect Texas-style beef brisket Bar-B-Q



Four delicious meals ready to be served to hungry customers



Vernon at his hardwood coal barbecue "cooker and smoker", a commercial kitchen oven he modified to take live hickory coals to slow-cook his meats and which does a simply incredible job at doing so . . .



A slice of their homemade Key Lime Pie, second only to their signature dessert Krispy Kreme Bread Pudding as the perfect way to top off an very satisfying meal



Their signature dish, Krispy Kreme Bread Pudding, simply orgasm served on a plate