

Apple Granny Restaurant is 4-time 'Best Fish Fry' contest winner

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Though the way in which fish is delivered to patrons has changed often in 13 months – indoor, takeout, curbside, indoor again – Apple Granny's prep standards have remained consistent. In a time when so much is unpredictable, a veteran kitchen staff and dedicated owners have doubled-down on a tried and true Friday fish fry recipe that is bringing some semblance of normalcy back to diners.

It's for that reason Apple Granny won its fourth consecutive "Best Fish Fry" contest this week.

Once again, the Village of Lewiston restaurant had the highest number of votes and voters.

Among the many reader comments:

• Robert A. wrote, "The fish is tender and the staff have been there for us during the pandemic."

• Joe K. noted, "Nice large tender piece of fresh fish with a light beer batter. You can get a large hot baked potato. Cool creamy coleslaw. Just pull up to the door and they bring it out to your car." He added, "It tastes great even when you drag it all the way home."

• Gail M. explained, "The fish fry is always cooked to perfection! The portions are huge and absolutely delicious! It's our go-to takeout place, because we are unable to enjoy sit down due to health circumstances. Service is always friendly."

• Gordy S. said, "The fish is amazingly fresh and flaky. I don't know where it comes from, but it is the freshest fish around!"

• Jennifer D. exclaimed, "It's perfectly fried, so flakey and the flavor is amazing."

• Joelle C. declared, "If you've ever had it ... you know! It's incredible!"

• Barbara J. summed it up: "Best fish fry in town. Always fresh. Large portions. Never a disappointment."

Owner Chuck Barber said, "I think that, throughout this pandemic, and the closing, and having to switch to curbside, and then slowly reopening, I know many people discovered us through that. There's a lot of people that took a great approach of wanting to support local businesses, and would try to rotate where they eat and try new places."

"We did get a lot of Erie County people coming down and trying us for the first time. I think people either rediscovered us and realized that we still have the same great food, or discovered us for the first time. It's great to hear that in the voting."

"The curbside Friday fish fries were a huge help to us. The community rallied behind our fish fries. I'm glad to see people still were looking for those fish fries, even during that, and we did our best to serve it out in the best – the safest – way possible. It wasn't always the fastest way possible (laughs), for people, but we really did want to make sure we did that: Continue to serve that consistently throughout the year in the safest way possible."

"We're glad that people enjoyed it."

Owner Michael Burke said, "What's interesting, prior to that ('New York State on PAUSE'), we weren't much of a takeout business – and we certainly weren't curbside. So, we were learning as we were going along."

"Last year when we were closed and we were just doing curbside takeout, the line was all the way around the block; and we had to rediscover how we were going to present our fish."



Apple Granny Restaurant owners Chuck Barber, left, and Michael Burke with their award-winning fish fry.

"It's good that new people probably caught on from that. Like Chuck said, it was very nice to hear that new people are discovering us."

Like so many other Lewiston business owners, Barber and Burke said the community stepped up during the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, and continued to show support even as festivals and concerts were canceled.

"The locals have been amazing," Barber said. "We can't thank them enough for continuing to remember us – and realizing we needed them. So, as much as I hope that they were ... enjoying our food, we needed their support and they really turned out. ... They were spreading the word to extended friends and family for those who discovered us for the first time."

"We definitely miss our Canadian friends and what the festivals mean to this village and this community and the business, from the sports tournaments that go on and all of that, the graduations and Artpark, all of that play a factor to us. This year was different. It was definitely an adjustment year. It was not the same year that we would normally have, and the summer and the festival."

"So, we also had to adapt – not only to a different way of serving, but at a different pace; and how to maintain the family that we have here. Our family – not just being our customers, but our amazing crew; we have a great crew here, and we were very worried and wanted to make sure we maintain their living for them, as well, and that we didn't lose that talent during this time. That was a huge thing to us."

"Part of what makes us (the best) – and I believe the reason you're here to celebrate with us this acknowledgement – is because of the great crew that we have; and they really stepped up. The kitchen had to operate differently. We had to run at a different, reduced capacity in the kitchen – in all areas. And many of our players stepped up."

Burke said, "There was a genuine fear that we were going to lose some of these people. I mean, pandemic aside, you want to create an atmosphere that they're enjoying working. And with a pandemic, it made it that much more difficult to keep these people. ... It speaks volumes that we've been able to keep the same people in there and produce the same amount of quality meals that we have."

Apple Granny offers an assortment of seafood options throughout the week, plus a year-round Friday fish fry (also offered Wednesdays during Lent).

"Fish fry" becomes this blanket term, and what Chuck and I've always said is fish fry, to us, always means beer-battered fish fry," Burke said. "It's fried; it's beer-battered. That's a fish fry. Baked fish is not a fish fry. That's one of those things that gets kind of lost in the shuffle. The nomenclature isn't always there."

"People ask us what's the secret of our



Apple Granny Restaurant's award-winning fish fry.

success: It's consistency," Barber said. "Every year we talk, I tell you how many years those guys in the kitchen have been here; so I keep adding another year. It's the same great talent that we've had back there have been there 20 years. And it's that consistency. We've had some people fill in, we've had some people help, but to have those guys there to train them in the right way, to oversee them in the right way – that's really what it's all about. They know what we strive for – they know what a quality meal looks like – and they're the first ones to not let a bad plate go out the door."

"We celebrate them. The consistency in the kitchen is really the key to all of this."

"Yeah, we don't have a lot of turnover here," Burke said. "There's really not a lot of new faces. In May, we'll start our seventh year (as owners). The bulk of the crew here has been with us the entire time."

"We could all think of restaurants we've gone to where we've had the best meal ... and then we order it the next time, and it's not the best meal anymore," Barber said. "I think most people would say about us is we're consistent. You know what you're going to get with us."

Many elements go into making a winning fish fry – from the cut and choice of fish, to the seasonings and coatings, the cook time and delivery speed.

Barber said, "We continue with a high level of checks and scrutiny. We don't just let it get delivered and serve it right away. We do a lot of prep and checking of it to make sure that it meets our standards, not just the standards of the vendor who brings it to us."

Burke added, "Every piece of fish in this building gets inspected by me or Chuck. When it gets delivered, it does not come out of the box and go right into the fryer. It gets inspected. We have a recipe that we follow, and we stick to it. I think that speaks to the quality of it, and the consistency of it, is that the owners are handling the fish."

Apple Granny Restaurant is located at 433 Center St., Lewiston
Its "Granny's Famous Beer Battered Fish Fry Special" (\$12.95) is described as, "Moist and flakey fresh haddock on the inside, crisp and delicious beer batter on the outside. It's quite simply one of the best you'll ever experience. Served with French fries and Cole slaw."
Visit <http://applegranny.com/> or call 754-2028.



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Contest!**



'Best Fish Fry' Results

**No. 1: Apple Granny Restaurant,
433 Center St., Lewiston**

**No. 2: The Beach House,
5584 E. River Road, Grand Island**

**No. 3: Ray's Tavern,
1694 Lake Road, Youngstown**

**No. 4: The Great Foodini,
2564 Academy St., Ransomville**

**No. 5: The Village Inn,
1488 Ferry Road, Grand Island**