

Village Inn is tops in 'Best Fish Fry' contest



Village Inn owner Mike Carr shows off the restaurant's classic fish fry, winner of Niagara Frontier Publications' 2022 "Best Fish Fry" contest. • Village Inn server Ava Eichel, middle, is with customers Bob Welch, left, and Myra Kaiser. All three are from Grand Island.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY KAREN KEEFE

Great teamwork and a time-tested recipe are the key ingredients to the success of the Village Inn's popular fish fry, says owner Mike Carr.

The Grand Island restaurant at 1488 Ferry Road took top prize in Niagara Frontier Publications' 2022 "Best Fish Fry" contest. Readers are polled on their favorites, and some respondents include comments on just why the restaurant tops their list.

NFP had 57 eateries receive at least one vote, and just about 400 total votes. The Village Inn netted 12% of the vote. Four-time reigning and defending champion Apple Granny of Lewison captured 10.3% of the vote; the popular Brickyard,

also in Lewiston, won 10%; and a three-time winner, The Beach House on Grand Island, earned 9.8% of the vote.

Customers who weighed in on the Village Inn's winning fish fry had mouth-watering comments about the culinary champ in their poll answers.

Kelly H. said, "Huge portions, always freshly made. Great service and staff, even throughout the pandemic."

Dorothy W. wrote, "Fish is flavorful, fresh, and plentiful. Fries and coleslaw are done to perfection. Service is friendly and timely."

Carr is a friendly and witty host who greets many customers by name and welcomes guests with warmth and charm. He credits his

customers and staff with the success of the restaurant.

"We are blessed with such a volume of customers that come in on a daily or weekly basis that we get to keep our food fresh – and especially our fish fries. Our fresh seafood, produce and other offerings are delivered two, three, four times a week, so we try to get as fresh as we can in Western New York," he said.

"We're lucky to have such a great staff that cares a lot," Carr said. "Everyone looks out for the best for the customer and, between the dining room and the kitchen staff, it's just a good, hard-working group. We try to keep in mind that they're appreciated every day, and it goes a long ways."

"Besides, keeping up with, maybe even some trends, or whatever might be selling a little better this week or that week, but it's also just being appreciated through times we've had," he said, referring to the pandemic.

The longstanding cooking staff includes 30-year employee John Lew; and Jared Carr, Jon Dudley and Mike Vallina, who have all



Each Easter season, Niagara Frontier Publications seeks out the "Best Fish Fry" in Western New York. We ask readers

to tell us which restaurant or social club offers the freshest catches, tastiest batters and most significant sides – customer service and price counts, too.

Though dozens of eateries have been nominated, only five have claimed the prize. Two restaurants – Grand Island's The Beach House (3) and Lewiston's Apple Granny Restaurant (4) – have won multiple titles.

Read more about the winners at www.wnypapers.com/best-fish-fry-hall-of-fame.

been with the restaurant between 10 and 15 years.

"We do have a rock star status back there of guys, as well as the servers – everyone helps out. It's a real team effort," Carr said.

On Good Friday, the Village Inn was filled with diners, with 40 or 50 cars parked outside, and customers eager to dine in or take out the traditional fish dinner. Servers, kitchen staff and bartenders and hosts were stretched to the limit, but by all appearances, enjoying the excitement. The restaurant is a popular gathering place for Islanders, as well as devoted customers from off-Island.

Carr reflected on what it takes to put together a great staff and a great product.

"You've got to pay people. The bottom line is, when you have a good person, you've got to keep

them on staff, despite the difficulties of payroll and food costs, and everything that goes into it," he said.

"We aren't the cheapest fish fry in town, but we have to keep our standards up, and so, we haven't raised our prices in a few years on the fish fry, but our quality hasn't wavered at all," Carr said. The fish fry is \$19. It comes in several varieties – Italian-breaded, panko-breaded, broiled, lemon-pepper broiled and Cajun-broiled. "Our beer-battered is our No. 1 seller. But we do sell all those, every Wednesday and Friday, and sometimes other nights of the week, as well."

Linda R. went with the majority in writing in her poll comment, "Beer batter is scrumptious."

Chris M's. comment on the Village Inn fish fry was, "Fresh, crispy and delicious every time I get it."

For James M., it is the whole package that makes him a fan: "Portion, flavor, creative sides, price, location."

Carr said the side dishes that come with the fish fry are plentiful, too.

"We always have the French fries and curly cues and sweet potato fries option." The winning dish is served with coleslaw. There's also the baked and sweet potato, which are standard every night. Also popular are potato pancakes that can be served with applesauce and/or sour cream. "But most popular is our tuna macaroni salad, because it's become known – or synonymous – with the Village Inn as being what people really want. We might sell 30 or 40 sides of that on Friday night out of the 100 to 200 fish fries we sell that night," Carr said.

Poll respondent Chris W. agreed. "They have a wide selection of ways to order it – panko-breaded is my preference – and their mac salad is incredible."

In addition, there are the options of mac and cheese, German potato salad, fresh vegetables and many others.


"When we started in 1988, it was always a fish fry with skin-on haddock, and we've kept that tradition all along in the 34 years we've been doing this," Carr said. "We do sell specials on our specials board every day, and sometimes

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