

'Savory Summer' a fan-voted contest

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The pulled pork, a staple at festivals and events – and popular with catering orders – is consistently good, Bryan said, because of the smoking techniques.

"It's an art to smoke it," he said. "It comes from a smoker" and depends on "the wood that you bring in. Everyone uses a little bit different type of wood. We've stuck with one farm, one wood, for 19 years. So, from a consistency standpoint, that's huge.

"I know people who do this and have trouble getting wood. One week, they're using hickory; the next week, they're using peach; the next week, they're using something else. It makes a huge difference in the product. People wouldn't think that, but it does.

"We've been fortunate with the orchards that we have in our area, that we've gotten with one of the farmers and they've taken good care of us."

To be named "Best BBQ," "It means a lot," Bryan said. "I think it's a huge cheer to our staff. I think it says wonders for our staff. A lot of our kitchen staff have been there for years, and that's where you get your consistency – and that's where the quality comes from. Today's day and age in the restaurant business, it's hard to keep help – and we've been very fortunate. The good kitchen staff that we've had, it means the world to us.

"Sometimes those are the little things you don't say 'thank you' enough for, and really praise them for how lucky we are to have them."

Best Fries – Wagner's Farm Market and Grill

2672 Lockport Road, Sanborn

You might not think a farm market would specialize in french fries, but Amy Wagner Winkelmann takes her spuds seriously.

"I offer four different kinds," she said. "We have fresh-cut curly fries, which nine or 10 months out of the year is a homegrown, locally grown potato that we hand-cut. It's a curly fry. So, it's a curly fry cutter. And then we have crinkle cut, a spicy seasoned fry, and then we have hand-cut sweet potato fries. I don't use a frozen sweet potato fry, because, of course, I have them fresh; so, I use fresh."

What difference does fresh make?

"Flavor," Wagner Winkelmann said. "Strictly flavor. Like anything that's fresh versus frozen, a lot of times if it's fresh you can taste that potato flavor – instead of just tasting almost ... it's not freezer burn, but you taste that freezer part of it. It does make a difference."

She noted, "There's certain people who come in just for our curly fries, because they're a fresh-cut fry."

Undoubtedly, they're the ones who voted Wagner's into winning this "Savory" category.

"We have loyal customers; we have very smart customers that know, maybe, better food than they can get some other places," Wagner Winkelmann said. "I try hard for people. And people know that I work hard for them. They appreciate it. It all comes down to just working hard. Keeping your quality up here.



Beef on weck at Taylor's Tap & Grill (Image courtesy of the eatery)

"Prices have gone up, and I have still tried to keep the quality up. And I've tried to keep my prices fair, which is very, very hard right now. But I don't want to sacrifice any of my quality. Because, if you start doing that, you might as well close – in my opinion. Because you can get not-so-great-tasting food a lot of places.

"I've been open for 38 years here. The store's been here since 1967. So, it's keeping that quality up that's kept us here."

Best Beef on Weck – Taylor's Tap & Grill

2279 Niagara Falls Blvd., Wheatfield

Winning Best Beef on Weck two years in a row – and by a sizeable margin – "It just tells

you what great customers we have, No. 1; they are 100% loyal to us," said Julie Taylor of Taylor's Tap & Grill. "Our clientele keeps us in business. We have regular customers that really come all the time, and they're really like family to us. So, the fact that they go out of their way to do something like that is incredible to me."

Taylor explained a winning beef on weck starts when "we do use the highest quality roast beef available.

"We don't cut corners, even with the rising costs of goods. I'd just rather serve a really good product, and hope that people really love it – and obviously they must – then to cut corners, even

with the way things are currently."

The quality of meat is important, of course, but so, too, is the preparation, and the customer service that comes with the dish.

"Our kitchen staff is some of the best kitchen staff around," Taylor said. "They work nonstop.

"The roast beef is slow-roasted, sliced thin. And then we do just a quick dip in the au jus, and it goes on a Constanzo roll, because we like to support local.

"A lot of the products we use are local things. We use Bison chip dip, which doesn't really apply to the roast beef, but we do as much local as we possibly can.

"And then the kimmelwick rolls are made to order each time in house, so they're not sitting around getting mushy. They're fresh every time you order. And the roast beef is sliced daily, so that's fresh, as well.

"They just really do a great job. My kitchen staff is incredible."

Other winners, not available for comment, include:

✓ **Best Frozen Treat – De Dee's Dairy**

8715 Niagara Falls Blvd., Niagara Falls

✓ **Best Hot Dog – Louie's Texas Red Hots**

Multiple locations in Erie County

✓ **Best Hamburger – The Wurlitzer Pizza Co.**

1401 Nash Road, North Tonawanda

The "Best Savory Summer" contest ran May 27 through Aug. 1. All restaurants, bars, street vendors and clubs headquartered in Western New York were eligible to win.

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