

Cat and Owl: Eclectic decor, delectable food

LOW MOOR – Sometimes, a restaurant has been in business for so long, it becomes, well, almost forgotten.

I “rediscovered” the Cat & Owl last week, and the reunion was certainly joyous. No wonder Roanoke City Magazine called it the region’s “Best Kept Dining Secret” in 2006. The place has an eclectic decor, and delectable food. The host, Bruce Proffitt, is as gracious and accommodating as they come.

Dining Delights

By Margo Oxendine, Staff Writer

When my companion and I arrived, we were seated in the Victorian dining room. Almost before I even had a chance to sense “trouble,” Proffitt leaned in and whispered that, while we had reserved this table, we might prefer another, in a different dining room.

Would we ever! A large party in the corner featured several diners with toddlers on their laps. Not my idea of a dining delight, but to each his own. One of the toddlers was quite vocal, shall we say.

In no time, we were whisked into another room, this with a sporting theme. The fact that I’m not a sportster didn’t bother me one whit. I’ll look at Sam Snead photos and golfing memorabilia any night, considering the alternative.

I have eaten at the Cat & Owl before but, I realized last week, not often enough. I will not soon forget my sumptuous meal; I’m salivating, just thinking about it.

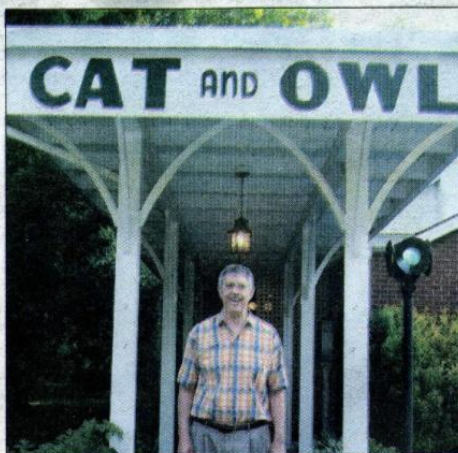
My tastebuds were piqued as soon as I walked in and discovered the nightly special was prime rib. And fried green beans. Fried green beans? Who ever heard of such a thing?

Well, Chef Scott Dew has, and now I have, too. They are scrumptious.

“I’ve never much liked green beans,” my companion opined. “Until now, that is.”

Together, Bruce and Scott have 63 years experience at this one special restaurant. Bruce’s father Buddy and Scott’s father Henry opened the Cat & Owl in 1971. Their vision, Bruce says, “was to establish a restaurant with a railroad theme and call it the C&O.”

Indeed, one thinks about trains as soon as one spots the entrance. It looks just like a railroad platform. You will want to stroll slowly toward the door, and continue “sightseeing”



Bruce Proffitt and his partner, Chef Scott Dew, have a combined 63 years experience at the Cat & Owl restaurant in Low Moor. Their fathers, Buddy and Henry, opened the restaurant in 1971. The C&O railroad, so important to the Clifton Forge-Low Moor region, receives a nod with the restaurant name, as well as the entrance, which resembles a railroad platform.

as you enter.

From C&O to Cat & Owl, the place is chockablock memorabilia – trains, cats, owls, cats and owls, interesting paintings and other art work, as well as a plethora of visual delights – I think I recall an antique dentist’s chair (or was it a barber? No matter, in the really old days, I think barbers and dentists were one and the same). A carousel horse hangs over the bar. The red-flocked wallpaper adds to the Victorian air of the place, which features several dining rooms. Other walls are weathered barn boards.

Make sure to stop just before the reception desk, and look closely at the photograph on the wall. The Proffitts have a place on the Cowpasture River. Since childhood, Bruce has indulged in walks along the river banks, collecting stones that resemble states of the Union. I forget how long it took,

but he eventually compiled a map of the United States with each state perfectly represented by a Cowpasture River rock. How fascinating is that?

Once you’re seated, however, be prepared to focus on nothing but the food.

Bruce notes, “The basic menu concept is driven by the fact that there is no substitute in the restaurant business for freshness and consistency.”

And how. The beef is cut when you order it, and then cooked over an open charcoal hearth. So is much of what’s on the extensive menu, including the pork chops, boneless chicken breast, and beef kabob.

I have never been all that fond of scallops. I tried them last week, though, and am here to testify: Nothing, but nothing, is as good as char-broiled seafood.

Bestsellers at the Cat & Owl are the fresh fried oysters, and of course, the char-broiled shrimp, scallops, yellowfin tuna, halibut, salmon and swordfish.

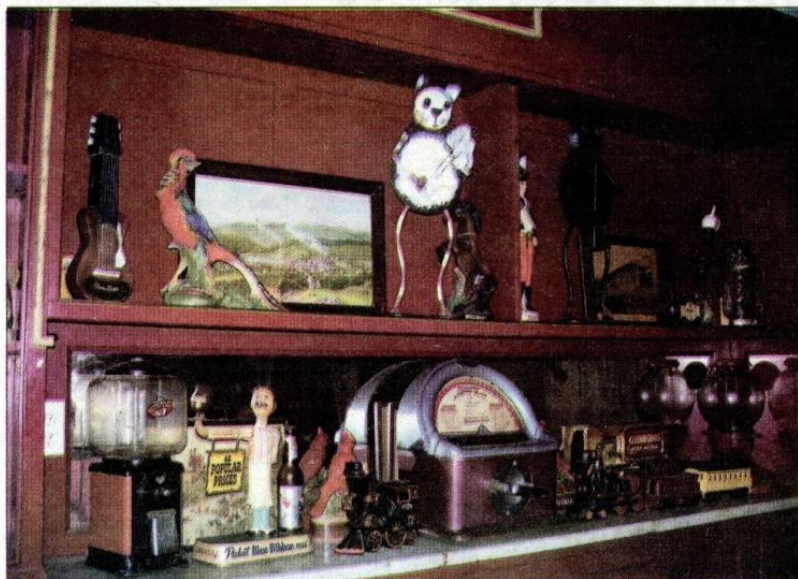
If you’re hankering for a lobster tail here in the landlocked mountains, you will find it at the Cat & Owl. Ditto for lump backfin crab cakes. If seafood isn’t your fish fancy, keep in mind that the rainbow trout is boneless – no trouble at all. You’ll also find cat fish filets, flounder and clam strips. Clam strips – when was the last time you found them on a menu?

The vegetable selections are almost too varied to make a definitive choice. There’s the standard French fries or baked potato, sure. Or a potato stuffed with cheese, bacon, chives, butter and sour cream (there’s an additional charge for that one). Then, there are the fresh sautéed mushrooms, the broccoli spears, the sweet snap peas, delicious crispy onion rings, broccoli-almond rice, or something extra special, like those fried green beans.

The salad bar is great – real bacon bits, for one thing; sliced hard-boiled eggs – every single item is fresh and cut in the Cat & Owl kitchen. Even the crackers are tasty, trust me.

And then, there are the desserts. No standard fare here, folks. Banana fritters. Heath Bar crunch pie. Deep dish apple pie topped with caramel. Sundaes. Lime sherbet. Coffee ice cream. Save some room, even if you must share.

The Cat & Owl is open Monday through Saturday, from 5 p.m. until every diner is utterly delighted. I didn’t mention the service: very efficient, attentive and friendly – all one could hope for. To get there, hop on I-64, and then take Exit 21 to Low Moor, toward the hospital. Just past the hospital entrance, you’ll see Karnes Road, and a Cat & Owl sign. Turn right, and you’ll soon see the restaurant on your right. Call 540-862-5808 for reservations, or visit www.catandowl.com.



The Cat & Owl restaurant is chockablock with interesting antiques, many of which feature cats, owls, cats and owls, trains, and other sporting or Victorian themes. (Recorder photos by Margo Oxendine)