

Check out David's for a great catch

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The catch of the day at David's Catfish House is its simplicity. Next to the Milton post office on Dogwood Road, locals clamor for the specialty.

"I love this place. We waited for a place like this for a long time," said Betty Davis of Pace, who was having her third meal at David's Catfish House in less than a week.

What Davis was holding out for was a basic family restaurant with a southern menu and reasonable prices.

"Our philosophy is to keep it simple," said Steve McKnight, one of the restaurant's managers.

McKnight actually was passing on the mantra of David Ross who opened David's Catfish House 25 years ago in Waynesboro, Miss. Ross took the restaurant to Monroeville, Ala., a few years later. Legendary author Harper Lee is known to dine there occasionally.

Ross offered to franchise the restaurant that eventually spawned locations in Atmore, Ala., Brewton, Ala., and Spanish Fort, Ala.

Pea Ridge resident Doug Brauneck had a restaurant proprietorship-pipedream. He noticed Ross's solicitation on a sign at the Monroeville location, and along with a silent partner, inked a deal to open one in Milton

Dining

GO: **WHAT:** David's Catfish House. **WHERE:** 5129 Dogwood Road, Milton. **HOURS:** 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday. **PRICES:** Lunch specials, \$4.99 to \$8.29; entrees, \$5.59 to \$13.99; all-you-can-eat catfish, \$10.99 to \$11.99. **PHONE:** 626-1500.

in 2002.

"We're a family restaurant," Brauneck said. "We don't even serve alcohol."

David's Catfish doesn't exactly fit the franchise restaurant mold. There is an assortment of clip art-quality props on the wall — fishing rods, nets, paddles, trophy fish — displayed like a case study in uniformity. But the menu is totally in sync with Ross's trademarked recipes; nearly everything is made in-house.

"We go through a thousand pounds of cabbage a week," Brauneck said. "When we're busy like that, we also sell 1,300 pounds of catfish."

The house slaw is finely chopped and not too heavy on the mayonnaise. The locals inhale it by the pint, quart and gallon, and



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Megan Peake serves up plates of fried catfish, fries, hushpuppies and cheese grits at David's Catfish House in Milton.

often take it home. The cheese grits are made with real butter. The onion rings have a beer batter, the closest the restaurant comes to serving alcohol.

The catfish is farm raised in Yazoo City, Miss.; the shrimp, oysters and stuffed crab are from Bon Secour, Ala. While most of it is fried, it turns out surprisingly light and not greasy. The two-piece catfish plate is a favorite choice, and they also serve it all-you-can-eat without the trough-

like nature of a buffet. On Friday and Saturday nights, this can create quite a queue.

"We like the fact that people are willing to wait," McKnight said.

In response to the crowds, a waiting area is being added to the building. McKnight also pointed out the ribeye steak entrée, which also can be ordered turf-'n-surf style and is discounted on steak night every Tuesday.

One devoted regular, Curtis Peaden of Peaden's Hairworks

barber shop in Milton had a lunch combo plate — a ¼-pound catfish fillet with shrimp and oysters. I told him I had ordered the same thing.

"I thought they did it just for me," he joked.

Ray Helms has eaten here since David's first opened.

"I get the whole catfish. The tails are the best part," he said. "You can get in here and get out and the prices are reasonable."