

Newsday

LONG ISLAND

NEWSDAY.COM

FRIDAY, APRIL 20, 2007 | LONG ISLAND EDITION

50¢

At 50, it's still lord of the onion rings

THE GOOD STEER

2810 Middle Country Rd.
Lake Grove
631-585-8212

CUISINE: All-American

CHECK: Appetizers, soups and salads, \$3.85 to \$9.65; sandwiches and burgers, \$7.10 to \$19.25; entrees, \$11.25 to \$29.95 (for T-bone steak), desserts, \$4.75 to \$5.20

HOURS: Sunday to Thursday, 11 a.m. to 10 p.m., Friday and Saturday, 11 a.m. to 11 p.m.

WHEELCHAIR ACCESS: Fully accessible.

BY JOAN REMINICK

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In Europe, it's not uncommon for a restaurant to be a century old — sometimes older. In these parts, if a place celebrates its fifth anniversary, it's a major achievement.

Which makes it all the more remarkable that The Good Steer, established in 1957, marks its 50th anniversary this year. The place, under the continuous ownership of the McCarroll family, started out as a drive-in, and, according to current co-owner Robert L. McCarroll, switched to table service two days later. Its original signature items — hamburgers and onion rings — remain top-sellers.

But this is not a restaurant in a time warp. True, a somewhat kitschy display of seasonal artifacts in an overhead loft greets visitors at the entryway. Otherwise, though, the cavernous place, divided into a series of inviting dining rooms, manages to



PHOTO BY PATRICK OEHLER

The Good Steer's famous onion rings match up well with the barbecued ribs.

convey a comfortable intimacy.

The menu, as sprawling as the place, is constantly being updated, as are the surroundings. Five years ago — before the barbecue craze hit — a slow-smoker was installed. What it produced, as an appetizer, was a particularly compelling, deeply smoky combination of baby back ribs and "Rochester" chicken wings.

There was more to admire. I liked that the tomatoes in the BBLT salad (bacon, blue cheese, lettuce and tomato) were sweet and deep red.

The signature burger proved

juicy and good. A marinated sliced skirt steak, ordered rare, was exactly that, served on garlic bread. A dish of house-made coleslaw was refreshingly bright, done with just the right amount of mayonnaise.

I wished, however, that the devotion to making most dishes "from scratch" extended to the fries, which were the prosaic previously frozen variety. But the justly famous onion rings — a mountain of thin, delicately crisp slices — were impossible to stop eating. Irresistible, as well, was the lush macaroni and cheese topped with bread

crumbs, an old family recipe.

Another old-fashioned treat was crisp, greaseless Southern fried chicken, served with homey mashed potatoes. But the biscuits and corn muffins promised on the menu never materialized. On another visit, when I ordered the smoky, well-burnished barbecued chicken, I had to make a point of asking for them. The muffins were too sweet, the biscuits dry and lukewarm.

I enjoyed the lobster roll, which, at \$12, was a comparative bargain. True, the lobster meat was augmented by

langoustine (there was also a stray shrimp in mine), but, overall, the roll was as satisfying as others I've had elsewhere for twice the price. On the other hand, Maryland crab cakes, served in a sandwich, were rather bready. And I was unimpressed with the North Atlantic sea scallops, overbroiled in herb butter.

To conclude, a lush cheesecake, baked and served in an individual crock, was a standout; it had been made from a new recipe. From the family repertoire came a parfait glass of creamy rice pudding as well as a homestyle apple crisp.

What this added up to was a winning formula: heritage tempered by innovation. It's a philosophy that should keep this Steer home on the range for years to come.

If you like The Good Steer, you also may want to try:

■ **Smokehouse Grill** — 296 W. Main St., Sayville, 631-589-9600

■ **Mitchell's** — 191 Rockaway Ave., Valley Stream, 516-825-9708