

The art of Barbecue

August 3, 2019



Brothers Artash and Artak have been barbecuing at family gatherings since they were toddlers, barely big enough to reach up and turn the skewers of meat.

Now in their 20s, the two Armenians trekked north from Los Angeles to explore this region after having heard their father extol its beauty and wonders.

Armen Mamadjanyan discovered Crescent City 20 years ago while taking a coastal tour north on U.S. Highway 101. He fell in love with the redwoods, the fishing, the hunting, the feel of real community.

“Twenty years later, he’s still coming back to Crescent City,” said Artak.

The brothers readily agreed Del Norte County was a region to behold, but it needing something they could contribute — barbecued food.

Eager to operate a small restaurant for as long as he could remember, Artak cut short his studies law and a month ago joined Artash to open Art's Barbecue.

Local diners quickly took notice of the restaurant's generous, savory portions, choosing from a simple menu of skewered chicken, pork and beef with a Mediterranean flair that was served up with a choice of three sides.

After just three days, the brothers' 200-pound supply of meat was exhausted. They ordered more of everything to meet the demand.

"We love barbecue," said Artak, "and we discovered they love it here, too."

"They're carnivores in Crescent City."

The brothers bought the restaurant's property four years ago. Since then, they've driven up from Los Angeles every couple of months to work on the building and prepare it for their grand opening.

Artash said neighbors have told them they were happy to see something finally being done with the property. "Apparently, it used to be this old, yellow building used by squatters," he said.

Their business plan is to keep prices low while serving up plenty of food.

Artash said he's the one who usually mans the grill, twice a day. "Artak usually mans the register," joked Artash, "that's more his thing."

In fact, their youngest sibling, Arman, 12, actually is becoming a crowd favorite behind the cash register, they said.

Out back, the brothers built a simple grill of homemade Armenian design, called a maxal grill — a sheet metal box encasing a brick surface that holds mesquite charcoal.

The meat is affixed to metal skewers, or sheesh, and placed across the hot coals, then turned regularly by hand for even cooking.

The benefit to this this grilling style is meat cooked from the inside out, preventing a burned, overcooked taste.

So far, chicken thighs have proven to be their most popular dish, said the brothers. But, Artak noted, beef is catching on.

The Armenian flavor profile stems from paprika, ground aleppo peppers, salt ... and a variety of other spices and ingredients the brothers are keeping secret.

The customer's is completed with a heaping serving of rice and a choice from three sides.

Artak said that while they could have chosen from numerous Armenian side dishes, American creations like coleslaw and baked beans provide a popular blend of Armenian and American cuisines.

With their initial month's success, the two now have plans to expand their menu and the facility itself, creating an outdoor dining area so diners can experience another aspect of Armenian culture.

"In Crescent City, after 8 p.m., it's like lights out," Artak said. "So we're going to add a patio out back, a terrace-like place with a big tent, where diners can order a beer or wine and sit and relax after a long day."

Art's Barbecue, at 132 E. Washington Blvd., is open Monday through Saturday, 11 a.m.-8 p.m.