



PAPPY'S BBQ: A DAYTON FAVORITE FOR MORE THAN TWO DECADES

By Matt Beardmore

TAP TO READ

Pappy's BBQ was just a "small little building that seated about 15 people" when Denise and Larry Wilburn purchased the restaurant in 2002. Although it is no longer a sit-down spot and it was closed for years at one point, Pappy's BBQ is as popular as ever as a catering and food truck option for those in the Dayton area.

When the previous owner of Pappy's BBQ wanted to retire, the Wilburns, who have lived in Dayton since 1985, decided to become first-time restaurant owners. Both, though, went into this venture with food service experience. At the Cinder Block Restaurant in Mont Belvieu, which was owned by Larry's mother, Ethel Pearl Ramsey, Larry used to cook during Friday steak nights while Denise was a waitress.

Once they took over Pappy's, Larry left his 20-year career as a welder and Denise continued to run her travel agency next door to the restaurant for several months before moving over to Pappy's full time. The Wilburns were working 12- to 14-hour days, 7 days a week, to try to establish Pappy's.

"It was a lot different than welding," Larry recalled. "I was working for myself and I had to meet payroll at this point. "I always like a challenge and so it was a challenge that we were able to meet."

The Wilburns have definitely faced some challenging situations with Pappy's over the years. The restaurant moved to a larger building in town around 2004 when they hired 10 more people, but the building's roof was blown off during Hurricane Ike in September 2008.

"The man who owned the building was slow in getting it repaired," Larry said, and when the Wilburns were told the rent was going to be tripled, they "closed the restaurant and bought a wholesale company."

The Wilburns were constantly being asked by community members when they were going to reopen Pappy's, but it was not until 2017 when the restaurant was back in business. However, there was a fire in that new space in February 2022, and after the building suffered smoke and other damage, the Wilburns could not come to

terms with the landlord and "decided to close Pappy's as a sit-down restaurant and just go into catering."

Around that same time, the Wilburns purchased a venue they converted into an event center. This 7-acre complex includes a 5,000-square-foot reception hall and a 1,500-square-foot kitchen.

Once again encouraged by overwhelming support from the Dayton community, which missed Pappy's famous BBQ baked potato, brisket, and other menu favorites, the Wilburns decided to participate in Dayton's Food Truck Friday a few years ago with the trailer they used as a catering trailer. "We advertised we were going to be there, and on that first day, there was probably a line of 30-40 people for 3-4 hours to get their Pappy's fix," Larry said. "We've continued that every Friday since then."

For more information on Pappy's BBQ, please visit its Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/Pappysbbq/>.

PAPPY'S BAR-B-QUE



& CATERING