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FRUITPORT

Helpful Hometown Service

Local New Business Profile: Savage Hog BBQ

by Calvin and Kate Holtrop

Savage Hog BBQ was only a food tent when Dennis Cooper and his wife started the business five years ago. Now, the restaurant occupies a cozy corner of a strip mall on Pontaluna and Airline Road. "A year ago, I was still in my tent," Cooper recalled, "and when COVID started, I started building my own trailer. We finished it, got a license in January. About a month later, this place became available."



Business was really good, selling BBQ from the trailer, with no overhead from rent or bills. So, Cooper considered opening the brick-and-mortar restaurant kind of risky, especially

during the pandemic. "But we'd already been here two years, we'd always been at Tractor Supply or up here at Pincrest. Having a following up here already for two years really made it easier to justify starting it."

Savage Hog BBQ grew quickly through 2020, which was, oddly enough, the Coopers' best year so far. "We did shut down for a couple of months, just [to] spend time with the family at home, kind of revamping our business plan," Cooper explained, adding that Savage Hog relied heavily on festivals and weddings, which were all cancelled. But he was surprised by the turnout once he was able to reopen in the Tractor Supply Company parking lot. "Every time we came out, everyone was coming out more and more. Kind of nice too, but kind of weird that the pandemic was my best year."

Catering has been a big part of what Savage Hog offers. Though Cooper really enjoys the catering aspect of Savage Hog BBQ, he and his wife had to quit running their trailer for a while this year because of staffing issues. Even though Cooper has hired on a few high-schoolers over the last year, he isn't sure how long they will be able to stay, since they will be graduating soon, and he can't spare the manpower to run the food trailer regularly and run the restaurant. But he still hopes he can get back on track with his trailer by next year. He's also really hoping COVID will get more under control and that all the festivals will open back up by next season.

However, as of early October, Savage Hog BBQ has still been catering weddings. "I started out catering, and that's still my favorite thing to do," Cooper said. "It's just kind of nice to be moving around, seeing different stuff all the time." He also enjoys the interaction with customers that comes with catering and providing mobile service.

As much as the Coopers miss being mobile, the brick-and-mortar restaurant keeps them busy. Since many people prefer to sit down to eat, many customers opt for other eateries because Savage Hog lacks that sit-down environment. But that might be about to change some. Dennis plans to get some indoor tables and to move an interior wall to open up more dine-in room, especially now that winter is approaching.

"A lot of guys sit in their car, they sit on the tailgate of their truck; and once winter hits, it'll be too cold for that until next year," Cooper said. He hopes the interior renovations will help his business and customers throughout the winter months, but still isn't sure it'll be enough to satisfy everyone.

Savage Hog is working on doing deliveries, as well as online ordering. And Cooper hopes that will bring in more revenue too.

Cooper also plans to name and mass-produce his signature barbecue sauce, a special recipe made by him and his grandfather. Cooper says he has been trying to get it a little bit sweeter without taking away from what it started out as. He hopes he can gain the customers who like a sweeter BBQ and retain those who enjoy his "traditional, competition-style" sauce.

So far, Savage Hog's biggest seller is the porky mac & cheese, a savory dish of smoked macaroni and cheese, topped with their excellent pulled pork

and the customer's choice of the restaurant's three sauces—the homemade, traditional barbecue sauce; a sweet BBQ sauce; or a Carolina-style sauce.

Two new arrivals to the Savage Hog menu are BBQ nachos, with a choice of pulled pork or brisket; and armadillo eggs, jalapeno peppers wrapped in sausage, then in bacon, then smoked and sauce-glazed.

You can contact Savage Hog BBQ on Facebook Messenger or call them at (231) 366-7210. They're open at the corner of Airline & Pontaluna Roads from 11am to 8pm Tuesday through Saturday, and 11am to 7pm Sunday.

Snakes

Getting Acquainted with Your Neighbors

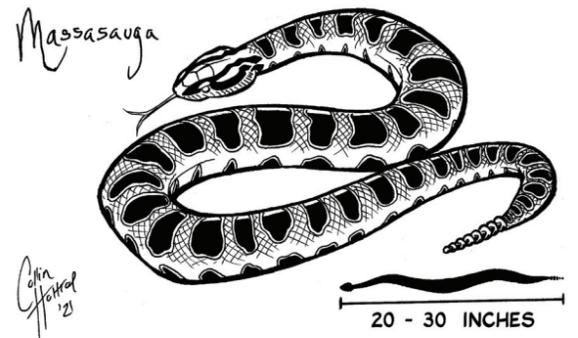
By Kimmie Holtrop

Art by Collin Holtrop

Are you afraid of snakes? I know a lot of people are. But once you get acquainted with your "next-door neighbors," they're actually a lot less scary and intimidating.

Your Michigan snake neighbors are in lots of places. Like your forest property up north, or the field by your schoolyard, or even in your own backyard! There are also many different species of snakes in Michigan.

What I think really scares most people is the big problem of not knowing which snakes are poisonous and which ones aren't. There's actually only one poisonous snake species native to Michigan: the eastern massasauga rattlesnake. Totally a relief! The massasauga is easily identified by a grayish-tan body with black spots. The spots have pale yellow rings around them. And, of course, there's the traditional rattle on the end of its tail.



Non-poisonous snakes of Michigan include blue racers (my favorite), eastern and western fox snakes, northern ribbon snakes, northern water snakes, smooth green snakes, and many more! However, whether a snake is poisonous or not doesn't determine whether it's dangerous or not. Even non-poisonous snakes may still bite if they feel threatened.

Getting along with your neighbors means you shouldn't make them feel uneasy. So, basically, don't bother a snake, and it won't bother you. Admiring snakes from a safe distance is a great way to overcome your fear, and have a more peaceful relationship with your Michigan snake neighbors!

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