



THOMAS MELVILLE/BAYSIDE GAZETTE

Virginia Barbeque owner Nancy Poret and store manager Lee Keefer opened the Pwnnington Commons restaurant to provide another dining option to bayside residents.

New barbeque eatery offers various flavors

BY TONY RUSSO
STAFF WRITER

BERLIN - Comfort food has lots of different criteria as well as different faces. The face it wears at the new Virginia Barbeque in Pennington Commons is warmth and consistency. It's one of the primary reasons Nancy Poret chose the franchise.

Knowing what you're getting is important to people. Poret understands that when every dining dollar counts people don't want to gamble it away. They want the comfort of knowing exactly what to expect from their meal and that's what she, along with manager Lee Keefer, tries to provide.

Unlike restaurateurs who start with a food idea and try to find the right landscape, Poret started with the landscape. She said she felt as if the nearby Ocean Pines community needed additional restaurant choices and wanted to establish a business that would compliment, rather than compete with, the other area

eateries.

Poret's search for franchise rights began by looking for a company that offered something different from what was already locally available. As she made her way through the maze of possibilities she stumbled across Virginia Barbeque.

Poret and Keefer made a trip to Virginia and visited several of the restaurants, sampling their way across the state. To their delight every restaurant's food was identical, from the barbeque sandwiches to the potato salad.

After some training in the other stores Poret opened her own with lots of corporate support and has already developed a following in addition to capitalizing on Virginia Barbeque's name.

She said one of her first customers was a man who'd recently moved from Virginia. The

VIRGINIA BARBEQUE

Where: Pennington Commons, Berlin

Hours: Sunday-Thursday 11 a.m.-9 p.m.;
Friday and Saturday 11 a.m.-10 p.m.

Contact: www.virginiabbq.com,
410-641-6001

gentleman often had Virginia Barbeque for lunch and told Poret how happy he was to be able to continue his noon meal tradition. Others have stopped in for the very reasons Poret expected - barbeque is a nice alternative.

But for all of the effort to make the food consistent, Poret aims to make the service extraordinary. Some Virginia Barbeque places don't have extensive seating but since Poret wants her restaurant to be as much a sit and relax place as a grab and go place, she decided to make sure people could stay awhile and enjoy their food in the dining room.

People who make that choice will likely be treated to a little of Poret's company. She prides herself on meeting as many of the diners are possible and getting their input as well as making them feel welcome.

What especially excites Poret is that with the addition of Virginia Barbeque locals won't have to slog across any bridge to get good barbeque. The more options that exist outside of Ocean City for bayside residents, the fewer trips they have to make to get something different for dinner. So far, it's worked out pretty well.

Virginia Barbeque offers three different region's barbeque recipes - traditional tangy Virginia, the kind most people think of when they think of barbeque; North Carolina barbeque, which is vinegary and not red at all; and Texas - a red sauce that has a smokier flavor.

If you're unsure which you like they offer a sampler platter so you can begin establishing your barbeque identity and affinity if you haven't already.

They've also already begun catering and look forward to their first huge event - providing the food for the Ocean City Air Show.