

# Burt's Meat Market isn't fancy, but it's tasty

By J.C. REID

**T**HE fried pork chop sandwich at Burt's Meat Market is a misnomer, really.

It's a pork chop, all right, lightly tenderized, coated in batter, deep fried and served in a paper tray with two pieces of white bread casually thrown on top. So it does follow the spirit of being a sandwich, if not the letter. Much like Burt's Meat Market itself, there's nothing fancy about the fried pork chop sandwich there.

Burt's has been a fixture of Houston's Fifth Ward for decades. It's a blue-collar kind of place in a tough, not-quite-ready-for-gentrification neighborhood just east of downtown. It is primarily a meat market, producing some of Houston's best Cajun specialties: seafood and beef boudin, mild and hot traditional boudin, smoked tasso, garlicky pan sausage and the tastiest andouille this side of the Sabine River.

But it also has a popular steam table for lunch, and that's where the fried pork chop pseudo-sandwich comes in. The prepared food area of Burt's is emphatically a take-out operation. There are no tables in the place, and in fact there are signs everywhere that instruct "No eating in line!" Which makes for some awkwardness when choosing how and where to eat the lunchtime goodies you pick up at Burt's.

Most people just take it home or back to work; others sit in their cars and use the passenger seat as an impromptu dining table, which often results in sheepish looks when another customer



FRIED PORK CHOP SANDWICH AT BURT'S MEAT MARKET

pulls up in the parking place next to them. But regulars know the procedure, and a friendly nod or smile is all that is needed in response. Another option is to drive a few blocks to Cliff Tuttle Park, where there is a newly paved parking lot and shaded picnic tables.

What you order at Burt's depends on where you will eat it. If you are taking it home or to work, the whole menu is available (the unwieldy and condiment-less pork chop sandwich is an option, for instance). If you are eating in the car or park, you may want to stick with finger foods and the dishes that come in containers. Here are some tips for a visit to Burt's.

If you will be getting something from the meat counter, do that before getting in line for the steam table (otherwise your lunch might get cold while you wait to order your meat). Grab a number and while you're waiting to be called, peruse the meat case. The butchers behind the meat counter have been work-

wrapped orders will appear in no time.

Now to the steam table. You're basically getting a lunch plate (one meat, two sides, bread or cornbread for \$7.89), a sandwich or just a container of something. Lunch plates are great no matter where you plan to eat. The sandwiches are recommended only if you are headed back home or to work. Much like the pork chop sandwich, the so-called BBQ rib sandwich is a large container of (still bone-in!) ribs with a couple pieces white bread thrown on top. Lots of room to spread out and a pantry of condiments will make this into a real sandwich. Still, at \$3.99 each, these sandwiches are great deals.

For a fast, filling and front-seat-friendly lunch, grab a container of Burt's outstanding chicken and sausage gumbo. A medium gumbo and rice at \$4.99 is excellent deal. Similarly, just a container of red beans and rice

makes for a quick lunch. Other options available in a container: chicken and dumplings, beef tips and rice, okra and sausage.

Finally, a note on Burt's boudin. Burt's often is considered the best source for boudin in Houston. I agree. But some boudin purists object to the overly rice-y style of Burt's boudin. In other words, there's a larger proportion of rice in the boudin here than in the creamier boudin you get in Louisiana. I've found this rice-y boudin to be typical of Southeast Texas, what you might call Tex-Cajun boudin, perhaps a legacy of the rice-growing tradition of our area. Eccentricities aside, Burt's is a regular stop for me and I'm rarely without a freezer stockpiled with Burt's boudin, pan sausage or andouille.

**BURT'S MEAT MARKET** 5910 Lyons; 713-674-0064

J.C. Reid is a freelance writer.

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