

## FOOD FIND

# Slow-smoked, fresh pulled barbecue at Alpha Pitt

Eatery launched by former Air Force pilot



The Alpha Pitt Smokehouse recently opened its brick-and-mortar home in York County, serving barbecue and other foods. The pulled pork sandwich, shown here, features meat that has been smoked for at least 12 hours. (Mike Holtzclaw/staff )

**Tasty discovery:** Pulled pork barbecue sandwich

**Price:** \$8 for a 1/3-pound sandwich, \$10.50 for a half-pound. An extra \$2.50 turns it into a combo, with a small side and a drink

**Destination:** Alpha Pitt Smokers, 2960 Hampton Highway, York County

**Hours:** 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. Mondays to Saturdays, 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Sundays.

**More info:** 757-782-2583, [alphapittsmokers.com](http://alphapittsmokers.com)

The first thing you notice about the pulled pork barbecue sandwich at Alpha Pitt Smokers is that the meat is indeed pulled. It's not chopped or shredded. It is carefully pulled from a large pork butt that has been smoked for 12 to 16 hours.

The result is a tender but chunky meat that allows the diner to savor the act of chewing.

"We've always done it that way," said Terry Burkhart, who recently joined Alpha Pitt after working at several restaurants in Williamsburg. "You don't want to over-process it like some places do. You lose a lot of the flavor of the meat when you process it down like that. We literally pull it from the smoked meat and leave it like that — it's always fresh."

The pork smokes overnight and is pulled the next day.

Jason Martocci — a Christopher Newport University grad and former Air Force pilot out of Langley — launched Alpha Pitt six years ago as a catering company, using a portable smoker to handle weddings, tailgates, parties and festivals. Over Memorial Day weekend, he opened Alpha Pitt's brick-and-mortar location in York County — a small but neatly decorated shop that deals mostly in takeout, but with enough space to comfortably eat in.

The key to good pulled pork (or any smoked meat), Martocci said, is "attention to detail." After much trial and error, they determined, to their surprise, that a larger pork butt cooks to the desired tenderness more quickly than a smaller one. He also cites choosing the right wood for the smoker and the right ratio of spices in the pre-smoke rub.

"You want to season the meat and bring out the flavor," he said, "but not overpower it."

For its barbecue sandwiches — pulled pork, brisket and chicken — Alpha Pitt buys buns on special order. Martocci wouldn't say where he buys them, but acknowledges that it took a lot of comparison shopping to find a product that met his standards.

"We do a lot of takeout business," he said. "That means it's being taken home or to the office, and the bun's got to hold up to the trip. It's got to be firm enough to hold together, but still taste light and crisp when you eat it."

A small amount of tangy sauce is put on the meat before serving, but customers also have the option of sweet, spicy or Carolina mustard sauces, which can be added after the fact or requested upon ordering.

— Mike Holtzclaw