

The Chipper brings authentic fish and chips to South Hampton Roads

By SANDRA J. PENNECKE
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Patrick O'Carroll, with halibut, left, and cod fish and chips, opened a second location for his Irish and English-themed restaurant, The Chipper, in the Arrowhead section of Virginia Beach. (Stephen M. Katz/The Virginian-Pilot)

VIRGINIA BEACH — Irish and British people commonly refer to their favorite fish and chip shop as a “chipper.”

And in Hampton Roads, The Chipper is where locals can stop in for beer-battered fish and thick-cut french fries called chips.

The name, referencing the slang, was fitting when Patrick O’Carroll, who hails from Dublin, Ireland, opened his restaurant in the summer of 2018 at 5619 George Washington Memorial Highway in York County featuring his homeland’s fancied fare.

“The name has as much of a recognition, say, as 7-Eleven over here,” O’Carroll said.

After continual coaxing by a loyal following of customers who drove to the Peninsula restaurant, O’Carroll acquiesced and expanded with a second location in South Hampton Roads. The newest Chipper restaurant opened Nov. 10 at 5604 Princess Anne Road in Virginia Beach’s Arrowhead neighborhood.

O’Carroll hopes to make fish and chips as popular here as overseas by expanding The Chipper through a franchise model.

Londoner Liam Mitchell-Bennett became the first franchisee purchasing the York County location at the start of 2021 and O’Carroll is looking for someone to take on the Virginia Beach spot next.

No stranger to the food industry, O'Carroll's career began more than four decades ago at age 15 working in a pub in his native country.

"We have a three-year apprenticeship at home for the bar trade ... when I finished that I came to America," O'Carroll said of his emigration in the 1980s. "I've been in the business since in just about every capacity."

He opened his first pub, Dicey Riley's, in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, in 1994.

Once settled in Virginia, O'Carroll opened the Irish American pub, Patriot's Grill in Gloucester. The patrons favored the fish and chips the most, and after he sold the restaurant, he decided to make that fare his next focus.

Other expats, military personnel and civilians who have traveled abroad are always eager to enjoy that taste again.

"It was only after we opened the doors that we realized it was a big draw," he said.

Cris Spurlock used to drive from Norfolk to the York County location at least once a month to get her fix of fish and chips. Now, the Manchester, England, native happily makes the 15-minute drive to The Chipper in Virginia Beach where she lends a helping hand as an employee.

Spurlock managed the Hampton Inn Oceanfront for 30 years and ran a British tea room on-site.

"I was brought up on fish and chips," Spurlock said. "My mum worked at a chippy when I was little so it's like our whole lives are around the fish and chips shop. I'm so glad we've got one now."

Authenticity is key to O'Carroll, who said everything is made fresh in-house and many items, including battered sausage, curry sauce, mushy peas, Heinz baked beans, and Lucozade and Irn-Bru drinks, are imported from overseas.

For those more inclined to lean toward American classics, burgers and chicken tenders round out the menu.

By the end of 2022, O'Carroll plans to introduce a third location and hopes to bring more and more chippers to the region.

"It's everywhere at home ... every parish and area has a couple," he said. "It's interwoven in the community."

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