



The Prairie Dog

Burrows its way into Hill City entertainment scene



The Prairie Dog Taproom is now open on the site of the former Firehouse Brewery at 23858 U.S. Hwy. 385 in Hill City.

Locals know brothers Michael and Jimmy Chidiac as the Prairie Dog Food Kitchen which began in the Black Hills in a pop-up tent at Boyd's Antiques outside of Custer years ago.

The idea to open a hot dog stand came in 2019 when Micheal and a buddy began remarking how there were no hot dog stands in the Black Hills.

"We should open one up," Micheal recalls then saying. "It was literally a joke."

Micheal, who is in software sales by day, called his brother Jimmy immediately and began to take the idea a step further. Micheal reached out to someone at Crazy Horse, who agreed to a deal over the winter of 2021. The brothers spent the winter building a mobile food kitchen with a drive up and walk up window to place at the monument. But the deal fell through, leaving the brothers and their dogs with no home. The brothers then bought a piece of property in downtown Custer, only to run into another roadblock.

"We found a piece of property downtown in Custer. We bought it. But we found out from the city you can't put a food truck on there," Micheal said.

While waiting for a variance from the city, the brothers decided to purchase a pop-up tent and ended up at Boyd's. But because of the way transient licenses work, the brothers needed to move after two weeks. They went to the Gold Pan in Custer next.

"We could see that it kept people there and it was a win-win. But then we had to move after two weeks," Micheal said.

After moving a few more times they opened their own location in Custer, getting great reviews and creating a following, Micheal



The Prairie Dog Taproom has something for everyone. Besides beer and wines on tap it also features food, games, music and merchandise. Settle in with a hot dog or saddle up with a beer, the new space will invite you to stay.

said. In the summer of 2022 people from Miner Brewery visited.

"They loved our food," and asked the brothers to bring their truck up during summer, but the variance the brothers had with the City of Custer didn't allow them to move their food truck.

At the end of the 2022 summer season Miner approached the brothers again, asking them to move "permanently." That move catapulted the Prairie Dog.

"All of sudden things started really taking off for us. We were getting a reputation in all of the Black Hills. We had people from Custer come up and see us, from Rapid," Micheal said. "We had tourists, lots of them came back for four years."

That's when the brothers realized that what began as just a joke had blossomed into a viable, thriving business.

The move to Miner helped grow their business but also their ideas. It was there that the idea of the self-serve tap was conceived.

"When we were over at Miner we started seeing the lines for the brews. People were getting a tasting and it was taking five minutes to make a decision on a tasting," Micheal said.

Prairie Dog Taproom avoids the lines, relying on a point of sale system so customers can get a wristband and pour until their heart's delight. There are various pour stations spread out around the Prairie Dog and include domestic, craft beers and even "good" wines since Micheal considers himself a "snobby wine guy."

One side of the bar is dedicated to people who don't want to use the self-serve feature or who want to try the Prairie Dog wine-based liquors.

The former Firehouse property is the perfect fit for Prairie Dog.

"We went into the backyard," Micheal said, and right away they knew the location alongside the beautiful creek would fit their vision of becoming an event cen-

ter.

"You could fit 400 people out there," Micheal said. "Gather, savor and celebrate ... those are our three themes."

Micheal said the brothers were looking for a space that would envelop the ideas of a space to commune, serving "wonderful" food and beverages and a place to hold events, concerts and with an intimate setting.

"We're gonna have something where people can come and have a great time," Michel said, adding he wants people to linger. "I just want you to have a great experience."

The brothers tell their employees to make it all about the "guest experience."

"Everything needs to be friction free," Micheal said.

Micheal said it's their goal to create an amazing guest experience in four different environments.

"They're gonna choose their own experience," Micheal said

The Prairie Dog living room allows people to cozy up next to the fire. The "merch" room offers unique items for purchase and gives people another space in which to sit.

People can opt to sit at the expansive bar or one of the many bar tables. Every seat offers a great view of the inside entertainment space which is already featuring music Friday and Saturday nights.

The last environment can be found outside where the kids can roam free while mom and dad sip a wine or beer creekside. The space is both family-friendly and pet-friendly.

The brothers will have an outdoor stage set up in summer, offering yet another opportunity to support local musicians and offer entertainment to the community.

Of course the brothers are known for their 100 percent angus hot dogs. The new location also allows the brothers to sell their 23 ingredient Miners Mischief Sauce, prepackaged to take home.

"Everybody loves that," Micheal said.

They also serve up a General Custer Bison Philly hoagie, sides like the Gold Rush air-fried taters and six different pizzas all made from scratch.

The entire Prairie Dog menu is Black Hills themed, and the brothers can serve a customer in house or people can get meals and sides to go.

"We just love being with the people. We love that more than anything else," Micheal said.

The Prairie Dog Taproom is open Wednesday-Sunday 11 a.m. to 8:30 p.m. For the most up to date concert announcements or hours visit the Prairie Dog Taproom Facebook page.

Story and Photo
by Leslie Silverman

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