

“The best potato salad I’ve ever eaten. Ever”

Richmond Times Dispatch, December 7, 2000

• • • Richmond Times-Dispatch, Thursday, December 7, 2000 **D11**

RESTAURANTS



Thinking about dining out? Here are a few recently recommended places.

NARITA JAPANESE RESTAURANT

Grade: **B**

- ▶ 413115 Riversbend Blvd. (River's Bend Shopping Center), state Route 10 east of Chester
- ▶ (804) 530-0013
- ▶ Offering sushi, noodle dishes and the more-familiar tempura and teriyaki entrees, Narita is a good example of how diverse American tastes have become.
- ▶ Lunch and dinner Monday-Saturday. Closed Sundays.

PHOTOGRAPH BY NAMED

Virginia Barbeque offers great meats, stellar potato salad

By Jody Rathgeb

Indecision may or may not be my problem.

One result of loving food so much is that I keep falling for new restaurants; you could say I'm just a girl who can't say no. Favorites or superlatives? Forget it. Sure, there are lots of times that I'm unimpressed, but when I am impressed I'm so happy with my current "beau" that it's hard to resist using words like "favorite" and "best." Yet those words are so exclusive! Oh, dear.

Anyway, Mom, Dad . . . meet the Virginia Barbeque Company, the latest barbecue purveyor to light my fire. What? Do I love it more than, say, Big Daddy's, Buz and Ned's, Allman's or Sibley's? Gee, I don't know . . . but I am in love.

This little place in Ashland offers barbecue in several styles, with an attention to detail that extends to its side dishes. The menu isn't huge, but there's plenty of flavor: pork barbecue done in either Virginia or North Carolina style, Texas beef barbecue, pork ribs and all-beef hot dogs. Barbecue can be ordered on sandwiches (\$3.25-\$4.50), on a platter (\$6.95-\$7.95), by the pound

REVIEW

VIRGINIA BARBEQUE COMPANY

Grade: **A-**

- ▶ 600 England St., Ashland
- ▶ (804) 752-4838
- ▶ There's plenty to love at this little spot, primarily for takeout. Several styles of barbecue and pork ribs are the mainstay, and they are very good, but it's the roasted potato salad that really stole our hearts. Catering is also available.
- ▶ Lunch and dinner 11 a.m.-8 p.m. daily.

Check for two: \$14.87

(\$6.50-\$7.50) or in a carryout package that serves four (\$13.95-\$14.95). Side dishes (85 cents-95 cents) are simple, traditional offerings: potato salad, coleslaw, baked beans and cornbread muffins.

It's primarily a takeout spot, but there is a little side room with two tables and a counter for those who want to eat in its pleasant, country-fresh atmosphere.

We ordered takeout: North Carolina pork barbecue (\$6.50 for a pound), Texas beef barbecue (\$3.75 for a half-pound), potato salad and coleslaw (\$1.50 each for a half-pound) and rolls (25 cents each). We wanted to get ribs, too (\$8.95 for a half rack, \$16.95 for a rack), but we had the bad luck to arrive when the place was out of ribs.

Now I want to go back for the ribs and the other

side dishes, because if they're anything like the excellent food we ate, I'm in for another great meal.

First, the barbecue. The pulled pork, seasoned lightly with a classic vinegar-and-spices sauce, combined smoke and tang in a fine, subtle way. Prefer less subtlety? Add some more of the North Carolina sauce and pow! The beef also starts out subtle and smoky. In Texas tradition, it is roasted without any sauce, but Virginia Barbeque Company offers a wide selection of possible sauces, all lined up on the counter. The woman at the counter recommended the house hot sauce, and it was a perfect complement to the meat.

Already we were impressed. But then we got a taste of our side dishes and became *really impressed*. Coleslaw here is balanced between creamy and tangy and is very fresh, and the potato salad, made from roasted red potatoes, is quite simply fabulous. In fact, I will use one of those superlatives I try to avoid: This is the best potato salad I've ever eaten. Ever. (Sorry, Mom.) It makes me want to move to Ashland immediately.

The only downsides to our barbecue meal were the lack of ribs and not getting the rolls we had ordered. We did without them, because we didn't discover their absence in our bag until we were home in Chester. But we forgave the inattentive moment because of so much attention given to flavorful food.

And that's what being in love is all about, right?

• Free-lance writer Jody Rathgeb is a former food editor and did her time as a waitress in her youth. The Times-Dispatch pays for the meals on her unannounced visits to restaurants.