



TASTES OF OUR TOWN

ALLSTAR WINGS & RIBS

by: Rob Lorusso

Becoming an All-Star is something all athletes dream of accomplishing. The personal sacrifices made, the extra work put in, all coming together with the ultimate in personal recognition. That title of All-Star, a hyphenated term that separates one from their peers, brings with it instant credibility and the understanding that by having that title attached to your name, you are among the very best in your field. When it comes to the very best restaurants in the city to catch great sporting events with your friends, AllStar Wings & Ribs certainly lives up to that title. Long before I even had the opportunity to have lunch with AllStar Founder and Owner Tom Anastopoulos at his 3130 Rutherford Rd. location in Vaughan, I once tried to walk in there with a friend five minutes before the start of a Leaf game. Let's just say I learned that day that watching the Leafs play at AllStar's is no big secret and I was on a stool at another establishment due to the place being packed.

Having built a sterling reputation since Tom first opened his first location in Markham in 2003, AllStar's has not only made the cut as a first-rate stop for sports fans, the constantly evolving menu and an abundance of choices makes it a hot-spot for people who love food in general. Instantly, anyone who walks in those doors is swept into a world of sporting nostalgia mixed with the finest in technology with High Definition screens everywhere and stereo sound coming through the speakers. The screens and speakers that afternoon were broadcasting the U.S. Open tennis tournament as the Stanley Cup Banners of all the original six NHL teams hang from the rafters (yes, even the Leafs have a banner) creating an incredible sporting atmosphere. To hear Tom tell it, were it not for some serendipitous and extremely unfortunate events, AllStar's may never have even been established. Having been an Aircraft Maintenance Engineer for a Canadian Airline, the events of September 11th, 2001 left Tom and about 30 employees laid off after restructuring.



"The instability and uncertainty of the Canadian aviation industry forced me to make some tough decisions, and I naturally fell back into the restaurant business," says Anastopoulos. He continued, "I had worked in that field as well since the age of 14, having literally held every position starting as dishwasher, busboy, server bartender, and then manager for various establishments in Toronto and Montreal." Having seen an opportunity to thrive amidst adversity, Tom jumped at the chance to start his own restaurant with all of that experience, "and the rest is history as they say." Tom had a very distinct vision of how he wanted his establishment to run; and subsequently each one that followed.

"Our guests are our lifeblood, as in any hospitality based business," said Tom. "We are committed to offering them our very best every time they visit us." Tom is very proud to point out that he is just as popular with families as he is with a group of twenty-somethings in terms of who walks in to his restaurant. That trust has led Tom to make some hard decisions in light of feedback he received from his clientele. When asked about trust and big events, Tom points to one particular

organizational decision made to keep his commitment to them. "When UFC started becoming popular we decided to conduct a trial with showing the events. The feedback and reactions we received from the majority of our guests, and especially the families, was not good for a number of reasons. Since then, as a rule for our establishments, we do not show those events."

After talking briefly with Tom about what choices from the menu we were about to indulge in for this month's instalment of the Taste of our Town, it was off to one of the booths to watch some tennis. To begin with, my associate and I shared a Greek Salad. The iceberg lettuce topped with red onion, cucumbers, tomatoes, and feta cheese and covered in a delicious dressing was an ideal starting point for the meal. Shortly thereafter, a single order of "Caesar Does Texas" wings was brought out and at first glance, I knew I was in for a treat. Based in a chipotle-style BBQ sauce, the wings are then topped with what seemed like a creamy garlic dip and parmesan cheese. When I asked Tom if I was close in my guess, he kindly smiled and shrugged his shoulders. I guess the secret to the best chicken wing I've ever had, and what Tom describes as "my most popular sauce," will remain with Tom a little while longer.

Then, after the wings, what else could have better complimented the meal then tasting AllStar's World-Class ribs? All 3 of the available styles of ribs, the Baby Back, Pork Side, and three Beef Ribs were brought out on one dish to the surprise and delight of me and my guest. Sauced to perfection in Tom's own house BBQ sauce, the ribs were mouth watering and fall-off-the-bone tender. Really, they're an absolute treat with each and every bite. Like a true All-Star, Tom wouldn't let us leave without trying one of the dessert offerings, a slice of Coveted Cakes Red Velvet Cake that put the finishing touches on a great experience.

I want to thank Tom and his staff for their extremely generous and timely hospitality. There's always something happening at AllStar's and a great way to stay in the loop is by following them on twitter @AllStarwings or on their official All Star Facebook fan page. There you can learn about everything from the menu to the newly recognized charity, the AllStar Foundation – Wings of Hope™ - Tom's way of giving back, along with his numerous sponsorships of local sports teams, to the communities he serves. If you want to get in the action and catch your favourite team with a group of friends, your night should begin and end with a trip to AllStar Wings & Ribs. But go early! With both of my AllStar experiences, I learned that there really isn't a better to place to find a seat for the game then at 3130 Rutherford Rd.

