



Big Bats Café

Swinging for the Fences in Stevensville

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The Major League Baseball season may be over, but the crack of the bat can still be heard at The Big Bats Café in Stevensville. This is the latest eating and drinking establishment that we are spotlighting in our ongoing series on themed bars and restaurants around the state of Maryland, and it's certainly one of the most fun to visit.

Big Bats Café is a 100 percent baseball-themed sports eatery that some locals have come to call "Little Cooperstown." Owned and operated by Stephen "Steve" Garland since its opening in March 1997, Big Bats is closing out its 25th anniversary year with the same great food, drinks, and customer service it's been known for from the get-go. Much credit has to go to Garland, who has always set the tone and pace at the business he still



has a passion for at age 73.

"I grew up with great parents," he said, during a recent interview with the *Beverage Journal*. "I was taught early on that there is only one way to do things . . . the right way! After spending four years in the military after high school, I went into business for myself doing construction work. I eventually started doing custom homes. I learned through that business that you can't afford not to do

Stephen 'Steve' Grland
Owner and Operator
Big Bats Café



things right the first time. But that's in every business. You don't cut corners on anything. I know in today's economy, you would want to. But you can't do that. You still have to have the best of what you put out there."

That means a menu of food items made mostly out of all-fresh products, including bar wings that have won multiple local awards. The menu is separated into sections with such

baseball-themed headers as: Coach's Choice (the specials), The Starting Lineup (appetizers), Bullpen (burgers, hot dogs, and cheese steaks), Field of Greens (salads), Sluggers (sandwiches and subs), Pinch Hitters (side dishes), and Grand Slam (main entrees). And the kids' selections are touted as "The Little League Menu." The kitchen staff also makes their own wing sauces, soups, salad dress-

ings, and more.

As for beverages and spirits, Garland noted, "We have 24 beers on draft. We have over 40 different craft cans and bottles of beer [including Atlas Brew Works' Bullpen Pilsner, of course]. We do our Orange Crushes with fresh squeezed orange juice. We have seasonal mixed drinks that our wait staff will recommend to people. In fact, we have some new



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selections that we're working on right now, because the weather is about to change."

But it's the theme that keeps the customers coming in. In Garland's view, there's nothing like good food, drinks, and America's Pastime. "The restaurant speaks for itself," he said. "Anyone who really likes baseball, they are pretty much in awe when they come in here with all of the memorabilia. There's a Nolan Ryan baseball jersey over here, a Pete Rose jersey over there. There is a Johnny Bench jersey on display. We have a room that has nothing but Baltimore Orioles stuff in it. I'm an Oriole fan, and

we're in an Orioles area. Chairs hang on the ceiling from the old Memorial Stadium, and there are Earl Weaver and Brooks Robinson signatures on them. I have an infield painted on the floor of the bar. The legs of our barstools are made out of baseball bats, and the seats are bases."

He continued, "We have 27 TVs throughout the restaurant. We have a large outdoor seating area that holds about 140 people, with three TVs and a bar outside, too. We have advertisement signs on the fence all around it that makes it look like a minor league ballpark."

And regardless of whether it is pennant race time or the off-season, Big Bats Café draws a healthy mix of locals and out-of-towners who either visit specifically because they love the place or are in town for other reasons and stumble upon the Café as a happy surprise. Garland remarked, "Just this past weekend [Garland was interviewed right at the start of the recent Astros-Phillies World Series], we were inundated with Philadelphia Phillies fans. They kind of took over the place for a while. We're located near a large venue that does a lot of weddings from all areas and different parts of the country."

So, why a baseball theme as opposed to football or hockey or sports, in general? Garland was quick with his answer: "Because I just love baseball. Period! I started playing amateur or-



ganized baseball at the age of 40 and played all the way until I was 67. To me, it's the greatest sport in the world -- one that if you play the game right, it can also teach you in so many ways how to live your life the right way." ■

