



BIG ROCK CHOPHOUSE

By Julie Alvin

Norman and Bonnie LePage began their long tenure in the dining industry when they quit their jobs and opened a doughnut shop in 1969. In 1984, they opened what was then called Norman's Eton Street Station in the Birmingham Grand Trunk Railroad Depot, and in 1996, they transformed it into Big Rock Chophouse.

The sprawling building, with its mounted moose heads and "foothills" signage, has an unmistakable Coloradan décor and all the nooks and tunnels that come with its history. The old luggage storage room now holds Got Rocks Cigar Lounge. The tunnel that once connected the station to northbound trains is now the Boulder Wine Cellar dining room. And below that, in another tunnel, is the full wine cellar, the bottles kept at an ideal temperature thanks to the cool surrounding ground.

Such private spaces, along with the outdoor stone terrace, have made Big Rock a choice for brides-to-be, with many choosing the restaurant for wedding showers and bachelorette dinners. Across the parking lot, The Reserve banquet hall plays frequent host to weddings, along with tasting events and bar mitzvahs. The space hosts about 150 events each year.

With its tall windows and ornate Swarovski chandeliers, The Reserve can fit up to 320 people. The attached tent, with its romantically draped white ceiling, could host the ceremony, serve as a dessert station, or, for one bride, be a place to escape the hectic reception for a quiet moment with her groom.

Customized Cuisine Chef Brian Henson customizes the cuisine for each event, and he puts as much thought into these menus as he does into those at Big Rock, where he spins

classic steakhouse fare by spiking a salad with Sriracha hot sauce or offering unexpected items such as ostrich with tart cherries.

Eschewing the cafeteria food often served at such events, Henson serves beef tenderloin on even the least expensive wedding package and offers a fresh catch of the day for the pricier option. Wedding guests also can indulge in Big Rock's best-kept secret – its exceptional beers brewed in-house. Big Rock's Norm's Raggedy Ass IPA won the gold medal at last year's World Beer Cup.

Beyond the food and drink, the staff prides itself on service, Norman LePage says. "We are so accommodating; we do everything but give the bride a back rub," he jokes. "And we'd probably do that, too."

Big Rock caters to all: the foodie, the beer snob and the bride. □

Big Rock Chophouse
245 S. Eton St., Birmingham
248.647.7774
www.bigrockchophouse.com

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