

Westmont Dining Review

Catching the Best Fish Fry

By Samantha Jones

March 2023

Westmont's Knights of Columbus Friday Fish Fry Season's Here

It's time to take a bite out of one of Westmont's favorite traditions. As the Lenten season is upon us, the Knights of Columbus Saint John Council 3738's renowned fish fries are back in action!

In observance of Lent, the time between Ash Wednesday and Easter, Catholics abstain from meat on Fridays. A sacrifice, which often sends many scrambling for dinner options after a long week. Not in our community.

Nestled in the heart of Downtown Westmont's Cass Avenue, the Knights of Columbus Fish Fries are a local staple, attracting regulars and newcomers alike. This year marks their first time returning to full capacity and normalcy since the Covid-19 pandemic! A special tradition for the community's heart and soul, considering the Knights' mission is to give nearly the entirety of their profits to local charities annually. Last year's contributions amounted to more than \$40,000!

Voted best fish fry by *Suburban Life* in past years, the small but mighty and experienced volunteering crew of Knights regularly serve an astounding average of 300 meals each week. All are welcome here, not just Catholics!

"We do a ton with a small kitchen," said chef Patrick Clark.

"We have taken pride in offering a known fish fry in the area," past Grand Knight Rick Vath shared. "We have watched it grow over the years to what it has become today,"

There's something for everyone in the fish fry's affordable homemade menu with some of the freshest fish and most generous portions I've seen in quite some time. There are three all-you-can-eat seafood entrees with add-ons available. Every plate also includes their homemade all-you-can-eat sides bar.

The whitefish is broiled with lemon and has a light batter, which packs quite the punch in the flavor category. Deep fried crab cakes are certain to delight even the most discerning palates as their seasoning finds its perfect match in the bistro sauce base flavored to a spicy remoulade. My personal favorite! The true measure of its crowd-pleasing attraction is when every member of the family's clamoring for a bite.

The beer battered Atlantic Cod's light bite and bold flavors are sought after too! Jumbo shrimp are also featured with a light fry and the cocktail sauce every quintessential fish fry is known for.

Even the youngest of diners can join in the fun courtesy of the children's menu's fish sticks and chicken nuggets. My toddler enjoyed his first taste of fish sticks and nearly cleared the plate! A rave review if I've ever seen one!

All dinners include an all you can eat delectable sides bar! Featuring a hearty soup rotation (last week's tomato bisque garnered rave reviews), fresh vegetable bean salad, coleslaw, macaroni and cheese, french fries and vegetables. The nightly variety may vary, but the rotation's quality never waivers.

Clark shared that all plates end up providing about two pounds of food. A rarity today considering the quality of food and the fact that their prices are still affordable, having barely increased in recent years.

"[An] incredible deal, while supporting a good cause," Clark added.

A cash bar is also onsite to round out your dining experience. It's hard to turn down a nice glass of white wine paired with the delicious seafood.

Smiles and clean plates always abound by the end of the evening. The joy of running into an old friend, or making new ones rival the menu itself. Like the *Cheers* of yesteryear, everybody knows your name at the Knights fish fries.

"So wonderful to be able to give people the opportunity to reach out and enjoy each other's company. The tummy gets satisfied and the heart!" Ladies Auxiliary Member Linda Anzelone enthused.

She regularly attends the fish fries and often sells raffle tickets for the Ladies Auxiliary philanthropic group, the female counterpart to the Knights, to further support their donation efforts.

"As far as food is concerned, my preference is the cod. I don't handle spicy well so I love the fruit salads and coleslaw. I think it's wonderful they have a variety like they do. Not one level that it appeals to. It's a multitude," Anzelone explained.

After pivoting in recent years to an exclusive takeout menu amidst the pandemic, guests and volunteers alike are thrilled this tradition has returned to its former splendor. Some carry out meals are still fulfilled each week, but it's hard to compete with the fresh and piping hot fish fry experience at the Knights Hall.

Anzelone is thrilled the weekly fish fries have fully returned, sharing what a joy it is to see guests enjoy their meals with the community week after week.

First-timer Bobby Davis was also impressed by the menu and camaraderie.

"The fish is wonderful and big bonus is all the classic sides. To top it off, the tomato bisque soup.... That was a big surprise for me," he shared. "I can't believe the crowd."

It's all hands-on deck to feed this village. The Knights begin preparations days before the fish fry itself. Chef Clark shared they do a lot with their kitchen's three hot plates and fryer, coupled with their tried and true assembly line of sorts. Spirits are always high as this skilled team entirely supported by volunteers come together, spending hours preparing and serving hundreds week after week.

One of the Knights integral missions is giving back to the community, as Vath shared they strive to support as many organizations in the area as possible. Last year's nearly \$45,000 in donations went to a myriad of recipients including Peoples' Resource Center, Westmont Scholarships and Youth Baseball Organization, Coats for Kids, Holy Trinity and more.

"The goal is to use the majority of our collections to spread good tidings to many organizations in the area," said Vath.

Their infectious camaraderie and passion for the food and philanthropy is truly refreshing and heartwarming.

There's still time to take your own bite of this Westmont tradition. The St. John Council Knights of Columbus fish fries are open every Friday during Lent from 5 to 8 pm at 25 North Cass Avenue in Westmont.



The fresh sides bar is homemade every week with a rotating menu. The sides may vary, but its quality never waivers. Staples like the kidney bean salad, macaroni and cheese, fruit salad, french fries and more are always a treat!



All meals are still affordable and the portions amount to nearly two pounds of food! A fish entree can be coupled with your choice of sides. Three of the seafood selections are even all you can eat! The fried shrimp and crab cakes are shown here.



The Knights of Columbus Saint John Council 3738 hosts their renowned fish fries every Friday of Lent from 5 to 8 p.m. at their hall on 25 North Cass Avenue in Downtown Westmont.

Published by Westmont Chamber of Commerce, One South Cass Avenue, Westmont, IL