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Babe's fried chicken dinner
photo by Chris Frütchie



Babe's Brings Classic Fried Chicken and a Loyal Fan Following to Frisco

By Suzanne L. Feinberg

WITH A PLETHORA of fried chicken establishments to choose from, Texans can be selective when it comes to this Southern staple. Year after year, Babe's Chicken Dinner House has proven to be among the most popular in the Metroplex. Collin County residents can now rejoice with the opening this month of a new location of Babe's in Frisco.

Over the years, owners Mary Beth "Babe" and Paul "Bubba" Vinyard have perfected their tried-and-true formula for creating fried chicken euphoria in what Mr. Vinyard describes as a "wholesome family atmosphere." In 1981, they started Bubba's; another popular fried chicken eatery in Dallas near Southern Methodist University and opened the first Babe's in Roanoke in 1993.

In addition to numerous local awards, Babe's has been featured on the Food Network's "Best of Classic Chicken" show and was named by *Southern Living* as one of six restaurants serving the best fried chicken in the South.

The Frisco restaurant, located just east of the Dallas North Tollway and south of W. Main Street, near the Frisco Heritage Museum, is the seventh for this successful regional dining establishment and the first in Collin County. It is also the largest of all the Babe's locations with a seating capacity of 315.

With a location just minutes from Pizza Hut Park, Babe's hopes to attract not only locals, but also visitors to the Frisco area.

"Frisco is a growing town and Babe's has quite a following," says Ed Greenwood,

general manager of the Frisco location. "So it's great for the community and for our loyal customers."

Mr. Vinyard agrees that Frisco made sense for Babe's expansion because of its focus on family entertainment. He adds that Babe's is fortunate to have cities courting them, asking the restaurant to consider locating there. Plans for the next Babe's locations are in the works for Cedar Hill and Arlington.

Management expects each location to become a fixture in the community. From participating in local parades, to entertaining local policemen, firemen and servicemen, Babe's quickly becomes part of the landscape and community culture.

In fact, Babe's prides itself on creating jobs for area high school students. None of the locations serve alcohol, so Babe's can hire young students searching for a first job. Many students work throughout high school and return during college breaks.

Management has taken extra care to preserve the old-time feel by recreating an old hay barn for the main dining area.

While the interior of each Babe's location is different, they all strive to fit into the neighborhood, which is usually a historic downtown area. The Frisco location is slightly different, because it is the first built from the ground up. Management has taken extra care to preserve the old-time feel by recreating an old hay barn for the main dining area,

complemented by the look of an “added on” kitchen and chicken coop for extra seating. Customers can expect the same sparse décor and simplified menu offerings, with a focus on quality food, fast and friendly service and fun times.

“It’s very casual,” says Mr. Vinyard, when describing the restaurant. “You don’t have to get dressed up. It’s noisy, so you can bring your babies and it will not matter if they cry or sing.”

From the jukebox playing oldies and country tunes to the occasional spontaneous group dance, Babe’s creates a memorable dining experience for the entire family.

“We’ve been known to break into the Hokey Pokey in the main dining area,” laughs Mr. Greenwood.

On a recent trip to Babe’s in Carrollton, my dining partner and I got a taste of this down-home atmosphere and hearty comfort food. Walking up to the restaurant was reminiscent of grandma’s house on the outskirts of town, complete with chairs set around the courtyard for people to take a load off and sip an iced tea while waiting for their table.

Diners sometimes wait up to two hours for a table at the original Roanoke location, so expect to wait in Frisco, even after the novelty wears off. There was no wait on this Thursday evening. We were seated in the chicken coop area adjacent to the main dining hall. Decorated with a few strategically placed lights, stuffed chickens overhead and old-fashioned signs with phrases like “You can always tell a Texan, but not much,” our surroundings provided the perfect backdrop for our chicken dinner.

The eclectic collection of chairs surrounding the plain wooden tables (no fancy white tablecloths here!) in the chicken coop reminded me of a large family gathering, the kind that requires fold-up tables and mismatched spare chairs to seat everyone. The atmosphere was so much like home that you are almost tempted to turn to your neighbors and

offer a taste of your entrée in exchange for a taste of theirs.

In fact, Babe’s prides itself on frequently serving large parties.

“We can easily accommodate large parties of 15 or 18 by simply pushing the tables together. Other restaurants may look down their noses at big groups, but not Babe’s,” says Mr. Vinyard.



Babe's Frisco location near the Frisco Heritage Museum

photo by Chris Fritchie

No menus are needed at Babe’s. The regulars know the drill and for the newcomers, the friendly, upbeat wait staff politely recites the limited options: fried chicken, fried chicken tenders, smoked chicken, fried catfish, pot roast and chicken fried steak.

Veggies, including green salad with sweet vinaigrette, mashed potatoes with gravy, creamed corn and green beans are served family style, along with biscuits made from scratch. Bottles of sorghum and honey grace the tables for your dipping pleasure.

Simple and satisfying, Babe’s food is made fresh from Mrs. “Babe” Vinyard’s very own recipes, “like our mothers made,” as Mr. Vinyard describes. All of the meats are hand breaded on the premises and fried in canola oil, for those health-conscious customers looking

for something remotely healthy about indulging at Babe’s. For \$10.99, you get a generous portion of the meat of your choice and as many veggies and biscuits as you can eat. A catfish dinner is \$11.99 and a plate of just meat or veggies is \$6.49.

To say Babe’s is a family-friendly restaurant is an understatement; we spotted small children at virtually every table. To accommodate and nurture those destined to be Babe’s fans for life, the Kids’ Menu features smaller portions of the adult menu for \$3.49 and may vary slightly by location.

The salad was served almost immediately after we ordered and the veggies and biscuits arrived shortly thereafter. Within 15 minutes of walking through the door we were feasting on a platter of smoked chicken. Every so often, a waitress would approach with a girl-next-door demeanor and ask if we wanted any hot sauce or a second helping of veggies or biscuits.

Desserts are homemade, as well, and vary from an assortment of meringue pies to pineapple upside down cake. We managed to save room for a luscious serving of banana pudding, adorned with meringue crowns, which cost a reasonable \$2.25.

While we were there, two patrons in the chicken coop celebrated birthdays, complete with lively crowd participation. We clapped along, as the waitresses plopped chicken hats on the heads of the birthday boys and cajoled them into flapping their arms like chickens while they sang a birthday song.

With smiling faces and full stomachs, we strolled from the restaurant joking that we did not need to eat for the rest of the week.

Frisco residents will undoubtedly enjoy the country-style, come-as-you-are ambience that makes the good food at Babe’s taste even better.

Suzanne L. Feinberg is a freelance writer living in Plano.