

cheddar *en fuego*

PRIME RIB BURGER
BACON
CHEDDAR BLEND CHEESE
CANDIED JALAPEÑOS
RASPBERRY SAUCE
PRETZEL BUN

Start with the best burger you can get. Dog Days use a prime rib burger, which is a burger patty made from a rib eye steak. Some say it's the most flavorful steak because of the marbling. Grill it to a medium temperature. Melt the cheddar cheese over the top of it. For the candied jalapeños, slice the jalapeños in half and scrape out the veins and seeds. Cut into strips and sauté until soft, then add a lot of sugar. Dog Days uses about three cups of sugar to two pounds of jalapeños. The raspberry sauce consists of pureed raspberries, blackberry brandy, black raspberry liquor, cranberry juice and sugar. Garnish the burger with the jalapeños. The pretzel bun is just that — a soft pretzel sliced in the middle.

working LIKE A *dog*

BY KAT MINX CONTRIBUTING WRITER
PHOTOS BY EDWARD BIAMONTE

With his red rustic T-shirt and cargo shorts, RJ Rau looks like a regular Lake weekender, walking the upper deck of Dog Days just mingling with the crowd. On closer inspection, however, there isn't a cocktail in hand and there's definitely motivation behind every single action.

Just like the adage says, "Looks can be deceiving." That's certainly true of Rau. Behind his even-keel, confident demeanor lies a determined perfectionist who climbed the ranks to rightfully become the general manager of Dog Days, a restaurant toward the end of Lk. Rd. 54-37 on the 19 MM in Osage Beach.

Before settling into his second home here at the Lake, Rau had some learning to do — but it wasn't the kind of learning his parents had in mind. Growing up in St. Louis, he attended St. John Vianney Catholic School, a private preparatory school. He confesses that he wasn't cut out for the school.

"I preferred the school of hard knocks," he chuckled. "I could never sit in a cubicle and work for eight hours."

He got his start in food service in St. Louis working for and managing family-owned businesses (what he prefers), and at the ripe age of 23 he was hired to work the bar at what was then called Salty Dog just six months after its opening.

Throughout his 15 years at Salty Dog/Dog Days, Rau has become a multi-tasking master. His culinary skills enable him to lend a hand when his kitchen is "in the weeds," but he can also be found at the front-of-the-house observing his floor, watching for any snags that might prevent his staff from

delivering the Dog Days guest experience. Words may make these tasks seem easy, but it takes a special individual: the restaurant holds 800 guests, includes four boat docks with 72 slips, uses two kitchens, incorporates three bars, and staffs 35 or more employees at a time. And yet, Rau claims no favorite position. The kitchen provides an unprecedented adrenaline rush and the floor is a perfect place to get to know his guests.

The restaurant also offers catering, and Rau heads up each service. Patrons may choose entrées from any menu among the three restaurants owned by the Barretts (Mark and Brian) which include Wobbly Boots and Shorty Pants.

"If there isn't something on the menu, and the people want it, we try to get it. Last week we catered specialty cheese." There is no doubt Rau has a strong work ethic. He clocks nearly 65 hours a week and sleeps about five hours or less a night. But he doesn't complain. In fact, he loves the ambiguity.

"Every day there is something different. One night there will be 60 guests and the next night there may be 600."

The Dog's new menu (put together by Rau and the Barretts) separates itself from the usual bar moniker with a selection of "Starters" including items like calamari, stuffed portabella cap, lobster cakes and shrimp. They offer 15 different kinds of gourmet burgers with names that suggest particular ingredients. Some of those are: The Frenchy (made with brie cheese), Baja Burger (sprinkled with spicy jalapenos), San Francisco Burger (placed on sourdough bread) and the Tuscan (dressed with roasted garlic). The 10x20 stage inside showcases well-known musicians like Candy Coburn and the Low Cash Cowboys, but that's just the



RJ RAU

beginning of their entertainment line-up. Since Dog Days prides itself on being family friendly, it hosts numerous free events like Wakeboard Rail Jam and Canine Cannonball. The restaurant's kitchen is open 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. seven days a week offering the entire menu at any time of day.

As the restaurant expands, Rau's responsibility grows with it, forcing him to cultivate his managerial skills. One thing he likes to tell all his staff members is, "Work smarter, not harder. It cuts down on your steps and makes your day go easier." ●