

The Washington Post

Windy City Red Hots brings Chicago to Leesburg

By Justin Rude
Washington Post Staff Writer
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Windy City Red Hots
28 S. King St., Leesburg

Contact: 703-669-8606. www.windycityredhots.com

Hours: Tuesday-Saturday 11 a.m.-9 p.m.;
Sunday 11 a.m.-8 p.m.

Prices: Hot dogs and sausages \$2.93-\$3.75.
Italian beef sandwiches \$7.75-\$7.95.

Wheelchair access: No

Kid friendly: Visit any weekend and you will find a dining room that has no trouble attracting families.

Tom Sietsema reveals secrets in The Washington Post Magazine's Fall Dining Guide. Also see it at www.washingtonpost.com/diningguide.

From the second city? Windy City Red Hots wants you to show your pride by placing a pin on your old neighborhood on their big pin-board map of the city.

Nestled into a small bay on the bottom floor of a charming old building in the heart of Leesburg is an unexpected homage to one of America's great food cities: Chicago.

Open since late May, Windy City Red Hots, a small dine-in and carryout hot dog joint, is the brick-and-mortar incarnation of a popular food truck that opened in Ashburn in 2008. Angel Miranda, a Chicago transplant wanted to feed his homesick cravings for a red hot, the Chicago-style all-beef kosher frankfurter on a poppy seed bun dressed with yellow mustard and topped with chopped white onions, sweet relish, tomato slices, a dill pickle spear and pickled peppers. After the success of his mobile operation, Miranda was looking to expand, and the opportunity presented itself when Leshner's, a small Leesburg restaurant, which also sold hot dogs, closed its doors.

"I was actually leaning more towards opening another truck," Miranda says, "but after that, it happened really quickly. I signed the lease at the end of March. All I had to do was come in here, paint the place and get it ready to

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go."

Two months later, an almost unheard of turnover time in the world of restaurant openings, Windy City Red Hots was on its feet and ready to serve red hots, Polish sausage sandwiches, Italian roast beefs and Italian sausages (at the same prices as the truck) to homesick Chicagoans and adventurous local wiener fans alike.

On the menu: Much has been written elsewhere about the busy brilliance of the Chicago-style red hot, and while I am not going to add anything to its well-established reputation, I can say this: Miranda does right by his home town. The snap of the beef frank, the cool sweetness of the tomato, the brightness of the dill pickle and the heat of the peppers practically sing together on the bun. Which is as it should be: When you name your restaurant after one item on your menu, it better be good. "Oh, yeah," Miranda says with a laugh, "it has to be exactly like it is back home. I have customers come in all the time that put me on the spot. They say, 'I'm gonna know, I'm from Chicago.' And I say, 'I'm from Chicago, too,' " he says. "It's not close. It's not similar. It's the real thing."

But even aside from the red hot, the menu has plenty of bright spots. The Italian beef is generous, juicy and flavorful: The split Italian roll drips with savory jus, and you can't go wrong with either choice of sweet or hot pepper garnish. Of the two Polish sausage options, I suggest going for the

Maxwell Street over the Chicago. The simplicity of the Maxwell's grilled onions and sport peppers (a hot variety popular in pickled form in the Chicago area) allows the flavors of the sausage to stand out more than the comparatively crowded Chicago version.

The Italian sausage sandwich is along the lines of what non-Chicagoan diners would expect, though the Italian Combo, which tops the sweet sausage with a small pile of roast beef is one of the menu's most indulgent options.

At your service: Walk through the small, cozy dining space and place your order at the counter. When your dogs are ready (it won't take long), they will be brought out to you. Expect smiles.

What to avoid: The pizza puff, a concoction that encases Italian sausage, pizza sauce, and mozzarella cheese in a flour tortilla, is

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full of flavor, but is definitely not for the grease averse.

Wet your whistle: One of the things that surprised me the most was the beer selection at Windy City Red Hots. I didn't expect a list of great brews that includes bottles from Bell's, Yards, Lagunitas and Victory.

The bottom line: As ex-Chicagoans from all across the greater Washington area have learned, Windy City makes a red hot worth traveling for.

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