



The Bison Bolognese makes the beefy flavor of the bison meat sing.

This Bison is **All Smiles**

The Smiling Bison in Baldwin Park features lean meat that makes delicious burgers, bolognese and more.

By Kevin Fritz

If you recognize the proprietors of the Smiling Bison — **Ron Thomas, Jr.** and **Joshua Oakley** — it may be from the food cart they wheeled around Audubon Park earlier this year, hawking handcrafted sausages with homemade condiments and freshly baked, locally sourced bread.

The two friends were simply biding their time and perfecting their craft until the moment was right to open one of Orlando's most original-fare restaurants. Focusing on providing high quality, handcrafted, and delicious tasting food — and never boring with a menu that changes every Tuesday — they follow through by offering distinct culinary dishes that do not disappoint.

The Smiling Bison, which opened in August where Red Light Red Light on Bennett Avenue used to be located, offers the perfect funky atmosphere for serving up its homemade, imaginative fare.

Being the Smiling Bison, it's no surprise bison is always on the menu, and it is winning over palettes city-wide. Chef Oakley, who previously worked at such successful local eateries as the Ravenous Pig and Cask & Larder, is a Buffalo Bills football fan and always hoped one day to have his own restaurant and serve bison. His wish has come true.

The Bison Burger, served on Texas toast without the crust and topped with smoked provolone, bacon and the chef's special mushroom

ketchup, is the restaurant's most popular menu item — and with good reason. The taste is distinct by its leanness; bison contains little fat. It is accompanied by a serving of homemade salt and vinegar chips or basil watermelon salad.

The Bison Bolognese is equally as pleasing, marrying house-made pappardelle with arugula and Parmesan. The Kale Caesar Salad, combining pickled egg, lemon vinaigrette, anchovies and capers, will instantly please your palate.

Before you order dinner, though, you must sample some of Smiling Bison's impressive appetizers. How about some Caraway Soft Pretzels, so fresh and warm and served with a spicy beer and mustard

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The tangy and rustic Low Country Pickled Shrimp is served in a glass jar.

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cheese sauce? Or sink your teeth into the Chorizo Scotch Egg, the sausage perfected from their days with the cart. Made with Lake Meadow farm eggs that are soft boiled to perfection and thinly crusted, the flavor combination will have you looking for seconds. Aptly served in small mason jars, the Low Country Pickled Shrimp flavored with lemon, onion,

olive oil and pickling spices is fabulous, as are the Roasted Local Green Beans, which are mixed with tender fingering potatoes.

An evening at the Smiling Bison is catered by a friendly and knowledgeable staff. The restaurant carries a selection of craft beers, an array of wines, and a handful of Boylan Natural Soda flavors.

The Smiling Bison takes reservations and serves from 5 p.m. to midnight Tuesday through Thursday and stays open until 2 a.m. Fridays and Saturdays. Its late-night menu is available after 10 p.m. **L**

For more information about The Smiling Bison, visit our website at CentralFloridaLifestyle.com.