

TICKET TO DINING

GO!

HOW TO GO

► **THE NAME:** Werner's Pork House.

► **THE LOCATION:** U.S. 68 and Interstate 71, northwest of Wilmington.

► **THE HOURS:** 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday through Saturday.

► **THE CHOICES:** Menu includes pork sandwiches, dinners and homemade desserts.

► **THE COST:** Pork sandwiches range from \$3 to \$4.50. Dinners are \$8; a sampler platter and all-you-can-eat pig roast are priced at \$12.50.

► **THE EXTRAS:** Specialties, from pulled pork to prime loin, are available in quarts and by the pound.

► **THE PHONE:** (937) 382-1111.

Werner's: Mom and Pop and Pork

BY ANN HELLER
Restaurant Critic

Just about the time I think that mom-and-pop restaurants have gone the way of a good piece of pie and a cup of joe, I stumble onto Werner's Pork House, nestled into a cornfield just east of the junction of U.S. 68 and Interstate 71.

It had been a dismal night for a restaurant critic. The restaurant where we had dinner, was, to put it kindly, nothing to write about. Quick pit stops at a couple other spots showed no potential. I was going home empty-handed when we neared the Pork House. We pulled off the road to check it out. If I had spotted the two big pig roasters outside the nondescript building, I might have quickened my step.

The dinner hour was past, so Rich and Barb Werner had time to indulge our questions. He bounded back to the kitchen to get us a plate of samples: pulled pork and Pork House barbecue, grilled pork loin plus slices of slow-roasted prime loin.

The word "homemade" peppered the menu board, so I had many more questions.

For all they knew we were just a couple of strangers passing by on U.S. 68, but he graciously pulled out some chairs and said, "Come and sit with us."



Did we want some coffee, he asked. She went to make a fresh pot.

I smiled because Mom and Pop are clearly still alive.

There was no doubt when she

suggested a piece of her sweet potato pie.

"I just took it out of the oven an hour ago, and it's still warm," she said.

How did this couple happen to locate in this unlikely spot, on the far side of an interstate interchange notable mostly for its truck stops?

"There was a building for rent," he explained.

The couple sold pork specialties at festivals and fairs for years, trading on the knowledge acquired during the years he worked as a feed salesman for pork producers. They were building up a checking account to finance their daughter's college education, he said. Now she's got her first job — \$48,000 a year and a company car, he proudly tells the strangers.

Six months ago they opened

the six-day a week restaurant. It is just a little place, only 18 seats, spread over a couple of rooms, but Werner pulls out an architect's vision of what the place will look like someday when they expand it to 80 seats. "But we're old-fashioned," he says. "We pay as we go."

For now Werner mans the grills, roasting whole hogs for 10 to 12 hours in the big black gas-fired roasters pulled up outside. His wife concentrates on baking.

"I made strawberry rhubarb pie last week for the first time," she says, "and I've got rhubarb crisp just out of the oven."

It was getting close to closing when a customer walked through the door. Werner checked his watch. "Right on

SEE WERNER'S/28

WERNER'S: CONTINUED FROM/26

time," he said.

"Yeah I was speeding to get over here for my favorite sandwich, and a cop pulled me over and gave me a ticket." It might cost him \$60, he speculated, but

back over the weekend. It was too much to expect that "Mom and Pop" would be there. They were on a catering job and have weekends booked through the summer, the girl behind the counter said. But she was amiable.

falling off-the-bone tenderness. "That way people can lick the bone," she says. And indeed that's how they were. A pile of pulled pork benefited from a squirt of vinegar-spiked sauce on the table. The marinated butterfly grilled pork, their sig-

thick slices of pork, tender and juicy as it rarely is these days, now that the pig has been bred to be so lean. Traditional side dishes of baked beans and slaw are on the menu, but I'd go back just to pig out on the pork.

I might just have to speed

pie. And maybe have a little conversation with Mom and Pop.

THE BOTTOM LINE

An oasis by an interstate

