

Hot Dog!

The Dogfather knocks this summer favorite out of the ballpark

Hot dogs have a stereotype. The worst conjure up thoughts of mystery meat, and the best usually take you out to the ball game. Convenience stores with their hot dogs turning all day on warmers and their stale buns haven't helped the image much either.

One St. George eatery is changing that image. The owner of the Dogfather says he'll make you a hot dog you can't refuse, and he delivers on his promise. And keeping up with the restaurants mobster theme, he'll take care of the whole entire family.

This was the challenge I took with me: three kids — the oldest 5 and the youngest 18 months — and my wife to watch my back.

The shop isn't particularly fancy, but that's part of its appeal. It's plain-Jane that you're looking for when you're dining out with three kids. The atmosphere is fun and relaxed. Walking into the shop almost takes you to the streets of New York. The murals of the redbrick apartment buildings and the concrete steps of Brooklyn include a fun illustration of the Dogfather and his thugs in trenchcoats.

It's also an indoors hot dog stand, which brings the Dogfather air-conditioned protection from the St. George heat. The seating area is filled with malt shop-style tables. And a low-height bar along the window is a good fit for kids.

The openness echoes the atmosphere of buying a hot dog or sandwich from a cart on the street. The restaurant evolved from just that — a classic hot dog vendor cart. Before opening the shop in November of 2004, Joe and his wife, Joyce, ran a stand with the same name in front of The Home Depot in Washington City.

Joe grew up in the beaches and docks in California with a Croatian and Italian background and Italian eateries and various hot dog stands were part of the food culture where he was raised. I asked Joe the difference between a Bratwurst and an Italian sausage. Both are hot dogs, he replied. "One is Italian seasoning and the other German seasoning," he said.

The Dogfather offers three all-beef hot dogs and four specialty dogs, but I must confess I wasn't up on my hot dog lingo. Luckily one of the shops ven-

dors, Bill, helped us through the options the day we visited. He suggested that we consider a No. 1 — "The Wise Guy," a foot-long that is perfect for kids. We ordered one for the two younger kids, topped it with Hawaiian toppings — pineapple and teriyaki — and split it. For the adults, he recommended No. 2 — "The Capo," a quarter-pound foot-long, which he said was the most hotdog for you money. It sounded appealing, but my wife and I went with other options.

I settled for "The Don," a mild polish dog — something a little special without too much spicy kick. My wife ordered the rib-eye steak sandwich.

The Polish dog was tasty on a toasted sesame seed-topped bun that was baked fresh that day by The Dogfather's bread supplier, Curtis bakery. I went to the condiment bar and topped it with ketchup, mustard and onions, just the way I like it. The dog was plump and juicy. I ate it so fast that my 5-year-old inquired if I was going to buy anything.

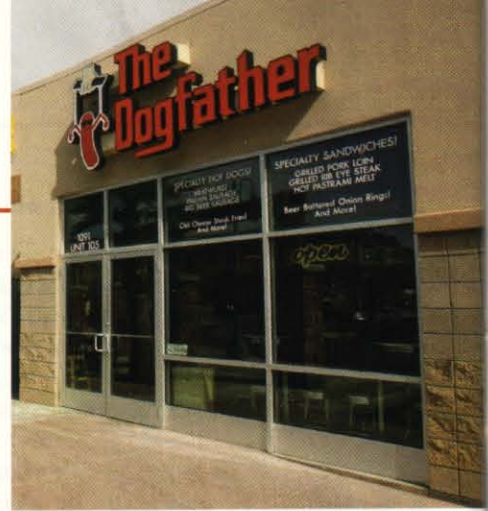
I also tried a bite of my kids' "Wise Guy." I'm not much of a pineapple-on-my-pizza fan, but it definitely had some tang and zip to it. Hawaiian pizza fans likely will enjoy the Hawaiian topping on their dogs.

My wife's rib-eyed steak was tasty. She offered me a bite and the beef nearly melted in my mouth it was so tender. The bullet roll tasted like it was fresh out of the oven. The taste is a result of thin-sliced meat, Joe's own seasoning and a bun that comes baked fresh daily.

The service was excellent. We were greeted and pointed to the menu board on the wall. During the course of the meal, the inevitable happened. Both my toddler and 4-year-old at different points in time decided to spill their drinks on the floor. Bill noticed the spill and told me he'd get a mop, relieving me of the embarrassed and bewildered look I must have had on my face. My wife liked the fact that the child seat we used was already cleaned off, which is a situation you don't always find anymore.

The Dogfather was a good place to take my kids. In fact, I later found out by talking to Joyce that the shop is popular among dads looking for a place to eat with their kids. It's low-pressure dining, which is what I like at this stage of life.

The Dogfather's service, food and price are all reasons I will be back with my kids. **SGM**



WHEN YOU GO:

■ **When** — Monday-Saturday
11:00 a.m. to 8:30 p.m.

■ **Where** — Corner of
Sunset and Bluff next to Panda
Express and Bajio.

■ **Prices** — Hot dogs range from
\$2.50 to \$4.60 and specialty sandwiches
top out at \$6.85 for a Rib-Eye
Steak on a bullet roll.

■ **Information** — Delivery is also
available through The Mobile Waiter,
628-1120. Request condiments when
you order.

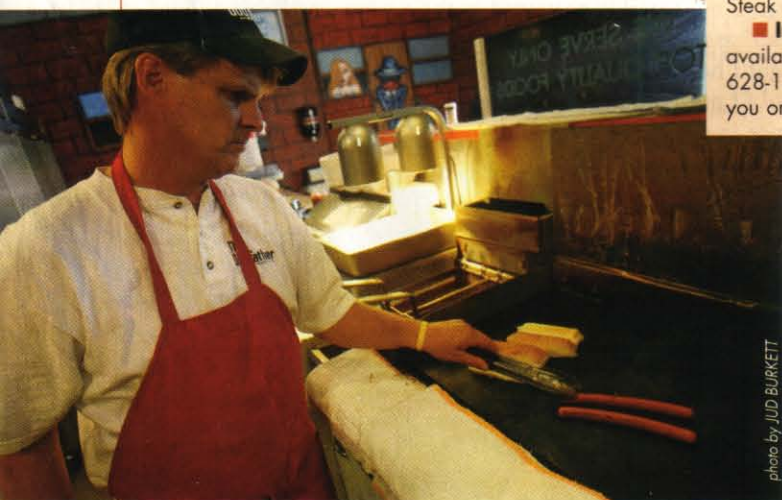


photo by JUD BURKETT

■ Bill Stone grills hot dogs at the Dogfather.