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Dormont shop does dogs with a fine-dining attitude

By Alice T. Carter
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When Captain Barnes and his wife, Rachel Dudley, decided to open a restaurant, they went to the dogs — hot dogs, that is.

In April, the couple opened Dormont Dogs, along a side street off a side street in the South Hills community where they already were living.

Barnes is a fine-dining chef with experience as executive chef at Sonoma Grille and executive sous chef at Seviche, both in the Cultural District, and a four-year stint as line cook and sous chef at Bruschetta's in the South Side.

His eventual goal was to open a fine-dining restaurant similar to those he had worked at. But first, he needed to know more about the business side of running a restaurant.

"I wanted to train," he explains. "This is like a business college."

He also likes hot dogs.

"They can be versatile, something fun, and for the space it worked well," he says.

Dormont Dogs features hot dogs in 15 styles that range from a plain hot dog on a bun (\$2.25) to deluxe creations such as the Arkansas (\$3.25), which adorns the wiener and bun with bits of real bacon, horseradish sauce, chopped green onions and an abundance of melted cheddar cheese.

The hot dogs are Sabrett all-beef, the hot dog made famous by the Manhattan pushcart vendors with the blue-and-yellow umbrellas. However, Dormont Dogs uses the softer, skinless frankfurters that customers preferred to those with natural casings that snap when bitten.

The wonderfully tasty, yeasty, sturdy but pliant buns emerge from the ovens at Kribel's Bakery in Brookline, which bakes a fresh supply every day.

"They hold up nice with all the toppings," Barnes says.

All the hot dogs on the menu pay homage to streets in Dormont, which were named for states. The hot dogs are accessorized to reflect the states' cuisines.

So the Texas (\$3.25) is enhanced with a Tex-Mex combo of chili, sour cream, melted cheddar cheese and crunchy Frito chips.

You're not limited to the items on the menu board.

Barnes and Dudley will happily work up the combination of ingredients you prefer. Vegetarians can have it their way, too, with a tofu hot dog (\$3.15).

"We have a fine-dining attitude. We're here to please the customer," Barnes says. "It's all about detail."

The tiny (four tables) shop also offers a freshly prepared soup of the day, garden and taco salads and homemade side dishes that include roasted red-skin potatoes, baked beans and coleslaw.

Dormont Dogs, 2911 Glenmore Ave., Dormont, is open from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. Mondays through Saturdays. Details: 412-343-0234.

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