

## Faithful Servants - Robinsons strive to exceed expectations

Written by By PATTI SELLS, News-Telegram Feature Writer  
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Feeding people both spiritually and physically is important to Dike First Baptist Pastor Ron Robinson, also the owner of White Oak Buffet, located 9 miles outside of Sulphur Springs on FM 69, two miles north of Interstate 30.

“Faith and trust are needed in everything,” explained Robinson of his role. “People come to White Oak Buffet trusting us to give them the same quality of food every time they come in – possibly even with an expectation or hope that it’s just as good or better than before.

“What we do in business is build trust – just like when you’re walking by faith; praying and seeking answer to prayer and your faith in God is encouraged. It’s a constant walk in business just like your faith is a constant walk in life.”

At one time, Robinson and his wife, Debbie, were the owners of seven Wendy’s franchises throughout Oklahoma, Kansas and Missouri.

The couple came to Hopkins County by way of Missouri, the “Show Me State.” Robinson said he had to rethink everything he had ever learned from his experiences in the fast food industry.

“Wendy’s taught us that location is very important,” he said. “But once we got into this area, we recognized people would drive a great distance for a good meal.”

Even though he’d always been a “burger man,” Robinson had dreams of opening a full-service restaurant, so he and Debbie began visiting some of the outlying area establishments in Miller Grove, Pecan Gap and Lake Cypress to see what they did.

“You might have to drive 20 miles and use a map to get there,” he laughed. “But when you got there, there would be a line of people out the door.”

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With that in mind the Robinsons opened the doors of White Oak Buffet in August of 2002. Their 5,000 square foot building with a large front porch, carpeted floors, stained glass windows and a stone fireplace in the foyer waiting area, was built with their patrons' comfort in mind.

"We work diligently to provide a clean, friendly place with good food and a fun atmosphere," said Debbie of the restaurant that can accommodate up to 120 guests.

"The main thing we want is for people to feel comfortable and to be confident that they are going to enjoy a good meal when they come out here," Robinson added.

White Oak Buffet offers fried catfish, baked tilapia, mini crab cakes, chicken strips, fried shrimp and boiled shrimp.

"I call the boiled shrimp my 'bait,'" said Robinson, explaining that the delicacies are already peeled and deveined. "It's my 'hook' to keep customers coming back 'cause they don't have to do any of the work. I was the first fish fry around here to do that, and it's working for us.

"I tell ya, they pile their plates up," he added with a laugh.

In addition to the main course, White Oak serves fried okra, corn nuggets, pinto beans, homemade cole slaw, seasoned fries, as well as hushpuppies and yeast rolls.

"We make our own red sauce and coleslaw," said Robinson. "Homemade banana pudding, too."

Blackberry and peach cobbler, along with soft serve vanilla ice cream, are also on the dessert menu.

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The cost of the all-you-can-eat buffet is \$14 for those 13 years to age 59, and includes a drink, dessert and tax.

Senior citizens eat for \$11; children 11 and 12 \$10.50; 8-10 \$9.50; 6-7 \$7.50; 5-year-olds eat for \$5.50; 4-year-old \$4.50; 3- year-old \$3.50; 2-year-old \$2.50; and 1-year-old \$1.50.

Additionally menu items available include a half dozen fried oysters for \$4; frog legs also for \$4; or a tenderloin steak for \$8.

Grilled items, including grilled chicken breast, mahi-mahi tuna or hamburgers, can also be substituted in place of meat provided on the buffet for an all-inclusive price of \$11.

Robinson said customer confidence has continued to build over the past six and half years, and having a Wendy's background has helped.

"It has built confidence and trust in that we know what we are doing," he said.

According to Robinson, he learned several useful strategies for a good business from Wendy's founder Dave Thomas himself – one being "menu creep."

"That's when your menu just keeps getting bigger and bigger," said Debbie, Robinson's wife of almost 33 years. "It's better to just keep it simple and do a few things really well."

Another tidbit of information shared by Mr. Thomas was the importance of an MBA – a "Mop Bucket Attitude."

"Cleanliness is apart of our recipe for success," said Debbie, who prides herself on maintaining a spotless facility.

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The Robinsons have taken on the motto of “Your Nearby Fish Fry,” in hopes that Hopkins County residents will remember White Oak Buffet instead of traveling the distance to eat fish at other outlying communities.

“We’re trying to get people to think about us instead of going out of town,” Robinson said. “You can get our whole bar, hot and cold, plus a steak if you want it, for \$22. You can’t drive to Rockwall for that kind of money and get all that you get here.”

Robinson says the hard work that Debbie, their staff and he put into White Oak Buffet is well worth it.

“When people say to me ‘This is some of the best food I’ve ever eaten’ – boy, that’s just like music to my ears,” Robinson said with his hand over his heart.

White Oak Buffet, 2327 FM 69 north, is open Friday and Saturday from 4 p.m. to 9:30 p.m.

Fish and shrimp combo dinners are available on the “to go” menu.

For more information call 903-945-2882.