



Leo Bakeberg Ranch House Cafe Dupree

with Leo Bakeberg IV and Laynee Bakeberg

Proud to be an
**SDRA
Member**



Tell me about your background

I graduated here in Dupree in 1998 and joined the Service. Right after high school I did four years in the Army. When I got out I got into the bar business. But I was too young and silly and it didn't really work out very good. I got into construction for awhile, then I got into this line. I ran a Papa John's in Spearfish for 8 years. I took a shot at Vegas, and worked at a Buffalo Wild Wings for about eight months. Then we moved back here. My grandparents were in the restaurant business around here, too. Nobody ever gets rich, but it's fun. We serve the community and make people smile.

So your family roots run deep in Dupree?

My great grandfather, August Bakeberg, also ran a restaurant here in town, across the street. I've got a picture of it on the wall. It burned down in the 1930s. My grandfather Leo, Sr., graduated here in 1948. My dad, Leo, Jr. graduated here in 1973. So he graduated 25 years after my grandpa, and then myself 25 years after that. One of the reasons we moved back here is (pointing to his son) this is Leo Bakeberg the 4th. I'd like his picture to be on the wall at the school with those boys someday, unless he's a knucklehead.

Was this a restaurant when you got here?

Yes. Harold and Marge Gage built it, and they owned it for eight months. My younger brother Alan was on the crew that built it. He bought it from them and he ran it for seven years. He's out working construction now, trying to find his chi. I'm hoping to have him back beginning of next year. He's an amazing cook. I watch him take an order around a twelve-top. "Steaks, how do you want them done, would you like jalapenos, would you like mushrooms on that," and he does the whole thing without writing anything down. I mean he's flashy, like the boys in the big city. I'm not like that. I can make people smile but I've got to write stuff down or I will forget everything. I'm a partial owner of the business. My partners are my mom and my stepfather, Trudy and John Eulberg.

What do you serve?

We've got a full menu. We probably have about 200 items on the inventory list. I was very overwhelmed with the menu when I first started, coming from the pizza business where everything was more simple. And we serve pretty much every-

thing all day. We're not in the business of saying "no." We order whole roasts, never frozen, cut all our own meat. We make our own chili, we do homemade potato soup. We make our own chicken noodle, with fresh noodles. My mom's mom was in the restaurant business forever. She's an amazing cook, so I have her on speed dial. We've got four different kinds of deli cheese. You can get fresh cheeses on your sandwiches. We sell fresh cuts of meat. Also we slice deli ham, cheese, we sell that stuff to go. We also cater. Last summer in June I did a cater in Eagle Butte for a first-time firefighter course. It was 144 plates three times a day for three days, so it was delivered three days in a row from 3:00 in the morning until 10:00 at night.

You have tons of antique items on display.

Where did everything come from?

Alan did this, but I went picking with him a couple times after we watched these guys on TV, American Pickers. We've hit a couple places up in North Dakota, a couple in South Dakota, but just old places and we'd dig through junk and he'd find these gems. People walk around here, they'll come three or four times and they'll walk around and see something they didn't see last time. And it really creates a buzz. People do enjoy it. And a lot of things people bring in. People come in and say, "This would look good, will you hang it up?" Well, absolutely.

How many do you seat in here?

We can seat 36 here and another 36 over there [the other side of a half wall]. We can adjust that a little bit. This wall in the middle is mobile, so when we do private parties we can slide that in either direction. Everything in here is mobile. I can move all these counters, and the booths are all mobile. Everything slides around if need be.

What days are you open?

Monday through Saturday, 7 to 9. I'm closed on Sunday.

What do you have for employees?

Right now I've got myself, and two cooks, two dish washers,

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and four waitresses. I bounce back and forth between the kitchen and waiting tables, but I'd much rather wait tables. I guess something I learned down the road was great service can make up for bad food, but bad service, doesn't matter how good the food is, you ain't coming back. And of course we strive to have both here. Gees, Christmas, my cooks are awesome.

What about advertising?

It's amazing what Facebook can do. I can decide on Wednesday that I want to do crab legs on Friday night and put it on Facebook, not hang a sign anywhere. I've got about 600 people on Facebook and we'll fill the house on a two-day notice. They come and they love it. And on those nights I bring back a couple of other employees who have moved to do bigger and better things, but they come back and do crab night because we have so much fun. We'll have four people in the kitchen, we'll have four or five girls on the floor. And I pay a lot in labor, but there's never an empty cup or an empty crab plate or a dirty table.

How important is this business to your town in terms of having a place for people to gather?

I think it means a lot. And I love to be here during coffee time because you know, there's not much excitement in town, but you catch every dang thing right here at this restaurant. And you know, there's no reason to be having to poke your nose around town; if you want to know what's going on, you just come to the Ranch House between 3:00 and 4:00 and you will hear about it. And there's a lot of things that don't need to be talked about, and that's not really what it's about. We get the mayor in here every day, having coffee. We want to know what streets are going to be done, what the water problems are, all kinds of things that we can work on together as a community to make the place better.

Do you get many visitors from outside of the area?

They're my favorites. I see people that I've never seen and I immediately go visit with them, and see where they're going, where they're coming from, what they're doing. We were open for Mother's Day, and we had a couple in. I went over to visit with them and they had these accents and I was trying to place them. Dang, I was having a hard time. They were from Australia. No wonder I couldn't place them. I don't know anybody from Australia. But they were just passing through the



area, came on a one month vacation and I don't know that I'll ever see them again but we had a good visit and I was glad that we were available for them on Mother's Day.

Do you serve alcohol?

No. When we get busy on a Friday night we've got to rotate them in and out. We only have so many tables. If we had people sitting around drinking, raising hell, I can't have it. And Mary up the street has a bar. I tell people if they want to have a drink, "Mary's up at the bar. She's a friend of mine, go see her for your alcohol." I serve Coca Cola and killer iced tea.

What's the best part of owning your business?

I like being a boss, being able to make any decision I want. If I want to sell T-shirts or if I want to sell cream pie, I can do it. Or if you came in and you told me that you wanted to have a Reuben I could put that on the menu. I don't have to send it up through ten chains of whoever to add something to the menu just to make a customer happy. I get to bring my son to work every day. You can't do that just anywhere. But I got my own place in this small town and he's part of the reason people come in. They want to see Leo. It used to be me they wanted to see, but I got no hard feelings!

What's the biggest challenge?

I guess I don't feel too challenged about much, but you know, winter sucks. Nobody wants to come out. We had a real cold, long winter. And just keeping food fresh. You don't want to throw anything away, and I don't want to freeze the meat. Getting business in could be the hardest part.

The business that we do get we keep 'em happy. You know, there's a lot of things that are hard, but I can tell you I like it a lot more than it is hard.

What's your goal every day?

That's easy. That's to make somebody's day better, whether it's by serving a good cup of coffee, or a good steak. And I guess I don't know if it's as much about making somebody else's day better as much as it is about making my day better, because seeing a smile or making somebody laugh, you know they're going to come back, you know they had fun.

You're a member of SDRA. Why did you join?

The credit card thing was what got me interested. I thought taking credit cards was necessary. And to me it was money in the bank, basically is what it is. They swipe the card, the money goes into the bank. You don't have to worry about whose hands it's touching or what's going on. There's a small fee involved, but to me it's worth every penny. ■