

The Rib House

In August the Boulder restaurant moved to the University Hill location Lau Lau's Taco Shop used to occupy

By Adrian Garcia

Every table was covered with a checkered red-and-white plastic table cover. In the center of each was a roll of napkins on a dispenser to help control the potential mess barbecue sauce could make.

However, at 1 p.m. on a Tuesday afternoon, The Rib House didn't have anyone making mess. In fact only one table was occupied by a single patron.

Dan Wolfson, a consultant at W&W Restaurant Group, says businesses in the University Hill area, like The Rib House, face a unique set of problems.

The Rib House moved from 13th Street and Walnut Street and filled the vacant space at 133 Broadway Ave. Suite B about two months ago on Sept. 6. The new Hill location means a new target market for the restaurant to appeal to, students.

"There is a different flow of traffic on The Hill. Businesses have high rent and labor costs and need late night business," said Wolfson.

Before The Rib House came to occupy the Broadway location, Lau Lau's Taco Shop struggled to get student business. After the Boulder City Council denied the taco shop extended hours of operation the business closed its doors in Boulder.

Wolfson refers to the situation with Lau's Taco Shop as proof the city council has stacked the deck against new restaurants on The Hill.

"Businesses lose traffic by not being open after 11p.m. The city wants a different set of rules for that section," he said.

Merry Ann Webb, a co-owner of The Rib House, is not



A plate of Tracy's Famous Illegal Ribs. This five-bone slab costs \$9.95 at the Rib House's Boulder location.

concerned with capturing the late-night customer. The Kansas City, Mo. native seemed to be too energetic and positive to accept anything less than success at the restaurant's new location.

"I like this location I just think Lau's Tacos didn't have a good product maybe," Webb said. "I want to do really famous barbecue and I want to make this spot really famous. The hill doesn't have barbecue."

Even without a famous barbecue spot, there are many options for CU-Boulder students to choose from on University Hill. Restaurants like The Sink, Half Fast, Cheba Hut, and Cosmo's Pizza are particularly popular among the coeds. Some of the businesses, like Half Fast, The Sink, and K's China, also have the advantage of doubling as drinking spots for students.

Wolfson defended the often criticized drinking spots saying, "It's not the merchants' fault there is alcohol abuse on The Hill. As long as, they meet the state requirements they have a legal right to serve liquor."

Webb doesn't want to alcohol to pull students in, but quality food instead.

Seeing an opportunity in Colorado's lack of authentic barbecue restaurants, Webb and her husband Tracy Webb decided to open The Rib House. The original Rib House was opened in 2003 in Longmont where the Webbs still live today.

"The difference with us is we're a Kansas City style barbecue so we only use hickory wood and we dry rub it, Webb said. "The key is the way we do it, we leave the sauce on the side and don't try to ruin the flavor of smoked meat with the sauce."

Merry Anne Webb has already made some adjustments to attract students like adding daily specials to the menu although she feels the customer base she built from The Rib House's previous location will sustain the business.

"When we moved from the other location we had built up enough business through catering and customers to sustain at this location whether or not we attract all the CU kids," Webb said.

She has also put herself in a position to compete in the healthy Boulder market by buying higher quality meat, and



TheRibHouse.com

The Rib House's logo featured on its menu, barbecue sauce bottles and other promotional items.

producing gluten free food. Webb is on a gluten free diet herself, and her barbecue sauces are sold in about 60 Whole Foods.

The Webbs have also varied the menu between the Boulder location and the Longmont location. In Longmont, The Rib House features a barbecue pizza, but because of competition from Cosmo's and others, the item won't be found on Boulder menu. Both locations offer a carrot cake that Webb's 82-year-old mother makes from scratch.

Though student turnout could be higher, the restaurant still brings in the customers they gathered at their downtown location. Drive by on a weekend afternoon or evening and you'll see many of the checkered tables occupied and the napkins being used.

Webb is confident that The Rib House will rise above the challenges new University Hill restaurants face.

"I'm not worried about going anywhere," she said.