

Ed's: A Tale of Two Taverns

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Community Correspondent

Somewhere among the sands of time, in the 1930s in New Jersey, a guy opened a tavern. Given that Prohibition had ended, folks liked the idea of being able to go to a neighborhood place that had good food and, even more important, served alcohol.

The tavern business was a pretty good business to be in back then, and the guy's nephew, years later in 2008, thought that it would be a good idea to commemorate his uncle's bar by opening a place called Ed's Tavern, in a Florida town called Lakewood Ranch.

The Lakewood Ranch Ed's Tavern was built on Rodeo Drive next to the town's movie theater, which made it a convenient place for people to go before or after a show, or a great place to hang out after an afternoon of golf or shopping.

Ed's Tavern seemed to have that right mix of good food, good drinks, and a friendly staff – in short, a place for everyone, in all seasons. Ed's Tavern flourished. Outside seating was added, and patrons could enjoy good weather and watch the water birds fly in and out of the shores of Lake Uihlein.

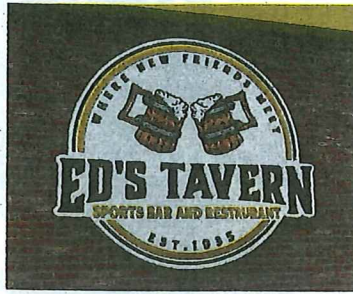
In 2014, the original owner of Ed's Tavern sold the place, but Ed's remained a staple of Lakewood Ranch. With all the success of Ed's Tavern, and the love that the Lakewood Ranch community had for Ed's, there soon arose an issue. The original Ed's Tavern had been built when most Lakewood Ranch residents lived north or south of S.R. 70:

However, a lot of the new development in Manatee County was happening to the north of S.R. 64. Manatee County built a two-lane bridge to connect Upper Manatee River Road with Fort Hamer Road on the north side of the Manatee River. All of a sudden, there were a whole lot more people up there than there had been just a short time prior.

Soon, gas stations, fast food franchises, car washes, nail salons, and storage lockers were built. But there remained a lingering question.

"Where up here can we find a place like Ed's Tavern – a friendly sports bar that not only is a great place to come to and unwind after work or play, but a place that we can go to with our family?"

The owners of Ed's Tavern took notice of this "service hole," and in mid-January of this year, a new Ed's Tavern opened off Upper Manatee



River Road, just north of S.R. 64.

The menu and drinks are the same as are offered at the "original" Ed's. But for those who live a ways north, driving into the parking lot of the new Ed's Tavern is a little like a homecoming. Maybe even better.

Ok, so at the new Ed's Tavern you won't have a lake view, since there is no lake right outside the walls. On the other hand, the new Ed's almost feels like someone decided to "supersize" the old one, but on a smaller footprint.

On a recent trip to the old Ed's, I counted something like 22 TVs. There were around 20 stools at the bar. At the new Ed's Tavern, I counted 20 stools at the bar – but that was just the inside portion of the bar. At the new Ed's, half of the bar is on the inside of the structure, but the other half is outside, along with something like another 18 bar stools! The new Ed's has a nice roomy inside, but there are screens outside, and the new Ed's has accordion-style doors that can be closed or opened to enable outside seating, depending on the weather.

As for the number of TVs at the new Ed's (I might be off by a couple) I counted 28 large TVs, many on or facing the patio area, in addition to two massive TVs using 4, 60-inch units, making for 10-foot screens. If you can't find your favorite team playing on at least one of those TVs, they either have a bye week or they aren't playing.

My wife really likes bar food, so I took her to the new Ed's. She ordered the brisket sliders, and really enjoyed the fact that each slider came topped with a nicely cooked onion ring, plus a nice helping of cole slaw.

As for me, I believe that the test of a good sports bar is their classic burger. The new Ed's did not disappoint (Ed's has eight different burgers on the menu). I got a half-inch thick beef patty, cooked just as I requested, with a tomato slice, pickles, and a slice of cheese, plus



PHOTOS BY ERNIE SOLLER



fries. The beef patty was firm, and not dripping fat, unlike burgers I've had at other places. We both rated this bar food as excellent. As for soft drinks, I generally go for Coke products, but be advised, Ed's serves Pepsi.

The new Ed's Tavern is located at 1305 108th St. E., right behind Wawa, and right off Upper Manatee River Road. Happy hour runs from

4 to 7 p.m., with lots of specials on food and drinks. Regular hours are 11 a.m. to 12 a.m. Monday through Thursday; 11 a.m. to 1 a.m. Friday and Saturday; and 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. Sunday. For more information visit edstavernfl.com or call (941)329-1010.

The new Ed's Tavern ... You drinkin' or what?