

## Carolina On My Mind

Heading south to the country my wife calls home placed us outside of Raleigh, North Carolina, this week on a wonderful old tobacco farm near the town of Garner. Our host, Aunt Margie, along with family and friends surrounded us with warmth and a passion for sharing life in the country. I can hardly believe that such hospitality still exists.

One of the first clues that you've entered the "Old South" comes in the form of nicknames. If you're a male it appears to be part of the rite of passage and I had the pleasure of spending time with Rabbit, Jeffro Bodine, Razor, Tater Man, The Fish Man, Woody, Fig, Boo and Hatchet. FYI...from this point forward my sons have asked to be called Wild Bill and Scoot

As it turns out, the heat this summer in Ohio did prepare me well for the summer in North Carolina. It is hot, really hot and I have a theory that it would be fatally hot if not for cold sweet tea, the official drink of the south. One tidbit I was shown here for ice tea fans is the addition of just a pinch of baking soda when it is being brewed. It neutralizes a little of the acid and you'll be amazed at the wonderful taste difference.

Saturday night offered us a great opportunity to see everyone in full swing as cousins Haywood Earl, Harry and Mickey organized an amazing evening at the tobacco barn filled with great food, friends and homegrown music. Now you'll need to know that the "tobacco barn" actually is an old barn. Years ago it was used for hanging and curing tobacco but today it is equipped with a fully functional kitchen and dining area that serves as an unofficial clubhouse for the local men folk. I'm not sure about all of the rules but women folk were allowed on Saturday night and they appeared to be treated really well. They were given good seats, cooked for and offered top-notch service.



On the menu board for the evening was breaded and fried crappie, sweet onion rings, fried okra,



hush puppies and locally famous cole slaw from Stevens Barbecue on Route 50. For dessert we were served up a heaping helping of live bluegrass music courtesy of the multi-talented local gentry who put down their serving tongs and picked up their banjos, guitars and mandolins.

I hoped to share with you the “very secret” recipe for Stevens Barbecue’s cole slaw but I met up with a wall of friendly resistance when I asked at the restaurant. “We never give that recipe out,” the young lady up front explained, “but I can tell you two things. Our slaw is made from fresh ingredients and it has a lot of love in it.” I really did enjoy the slaw and I want to offer “my take” on how it was made.

**(Our Version Of) Stevens Barbecue’s Carolina Slaw**  
(serves 8 to 10)

8 cups finely shredded cabbage  
3 medium to small sweet baby gherkin pickles, finely diced  
1 cup finely shredded green outer leaves from cabbage  
1 small sweet onion, finely diced

For the dressing:

½ cup sugar  
1 ¼ teaspoon salt  
¼ cup good quality cider vinegar  
¼ cup cold water  
¼ cup good commercial mayonnaise  
½ teaspoon Coleman’s ground mustard

Place cabbage, onion and pickles in a food processor and pulse until all contents have been chopped to the approximate size of rice crispies cereal. This can be accomplished by hand but will take time and patience.

Combine all dressing ingredients in a medium bowl and whisk briskly for about one minute to blend together. Add and mix gradually into your chopped cabbage mix until

you reach the level of moistness desired. Taste and adjust salt to your personal preference.

For great deep-frying I always use peanut oil and please do yourself the favor and invest in a serious deep frying system. The most affordable is the same rig used to deep fry turkey and it normally comes with a metal basket insert specifically for fish. The boys at the barn used a commercial professional style fryer purchased second hand from a school.

### **Breaded & Fried Crappie**

Plan at least 1 pound of fillets for every two people eating. The fillets should be cut into 1-inch wide strips and be completely thawed if previously frozen. For your breading combine in a gallon sized freezer storage bag:

3 cups fine yellow cornmeal  
1 cup all purpose flour  
1 1/2 tablespoons Old Bay seafood seasoning  
salt and white pepper to taste

Make sure your oil is 350 degrees F and working in small batches of 12 to 15 strips, place them in the bag with the breading mix and coat them thoroughly. Place them in your fryer basket and drop into the hot oil. Shake them briefly to make sure none of the fish strips stick together. Cook to a golden brown, about 3 to 4 minutes.

A great way to hold your fish or any of your other fried foods is in a heavy aluminum baking tray lined with paper towels and covered with heavy duty foil to hold in the heat. Be sure not to over crowd your fry basket and make sure your oil temperature is back to 350 degrees F before dropping in a new batch.

A great fish fry is the perfect time to bring out a cold, refreshing Pinot Grigio and one of the best I've ever experienced is the *Elena Walch 2003 Alto Adige Pinot Grigio*. This crisp clean white wine provides complexity along with a fun, easy to enjoy styling based around flavors of fresh citrus fruit, a richer than normal structure and a finish unlike any Pinot Grigio ever tasted previously.

This Italian white sets the high water mark for other Pinot Grigios as far as we are concerned. You really should try it.

If your taste runs more to the fruity styles in wines the *Martin & Weyrich 2004 Moscato Allegro* is a perfect wine for all types of fish and seafood. The first time I recommended this wine more as a cocktail with appetizers the response we got back from readers who tried the wine and loved it was amazing. With just a hint of fizz and that spicy, foxy character of the Moscato grape, this wine is an excellent one to keep available for fun times with or without food.

We send our homegrown greetings from the countryside of North Carolina and hope you'll remember to call with any questions or comments. Reach us at 888-288-0668 or on the web at [www.winedog.com](http://www.winedog.com). Cheers, y'all.