



Enjoy Food, Revel in Sports Memorabilia at Big Daddy's Badass Bento

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By Ellen Spitaleri

There's a lot going on at the corner of SE 22nd Ave. and Powell Blvd. The outside of the building features a colorful mural and a sign for Big Daddy's Badass Bento, while around the corner is Big Daddy's CBD. Inside is a kitchen producing Southern-Asian fusion, a playroom available for hire for special events and enough sports memorabilia to fill a museum.

Overseeing all this is owner Steve Anderson, "Big Daddy" himself. Anderson said he knew he wanted to be an entrepreneur in the eighth grade. Since he moved to Portland in 1991, he has opened three restaurants, owned cellphone stores and a golf store, has been catering weddings and festivals for 20 years and has been a restaurant consultant.

Big Daddy's Badass Bento opened four months ago, serving elevated box lunches using his mother's and grandmother's recipes. As the oldest of four children, "I took over the grill when I was in the eighth grade," Anderson said, and now Big Daddy's goal is to offer good food while keeping it affordable. During the school year, Cleveland High School students line up for fast lunches, while now, in the summer, workers from nearby businesses swing by during their lunch hours. "All the neighbors have embraced us; this is a fun neighborhood spot with fun food," Anderson said.

Although Big Daddy’s serves bento meals, they are not traditional bentos; the word bento simply means a boxed lunch to go, usually featuring cooked food over white or brown rice, he said. Most of the bentos cost \$12, although when school starts up in September, Anderson will offer a student special for \$9.

Popular options include island chicken, marinated chicken thighs in a tropical sauce; Carolina pork, pulled pork smothered in a sweet and smoky Carolina-style barbeque sauce; and Italian beef, slow-cooked and braised seasoned beef. Other popular options are loco moco, a Hawaiian classic with a beef patty, steamed rice, gravy and a fried egg; Cajun red beans with spicy andouille sausage; Louisiana shrimp seasoned with New Orleans-style sauces; and a vegetarian dish with sauteed vegetables.

On the weekends, Big Daddy’s offers brisket, ribs and macaroni and cheese. For those with a sweet tooth, check out the freshly made cookies, cupcakes and ice cream sandwiches.

Customers can also purchase the sauces and spice mixes used to make all the dishes, Anderson noted. Drinks include beer, wine and custom lemonade.

Although the focus of Big Daddy’s Badass Bento is food, the decor pays homage to a variety of sports near and dear to Anderson’s heart. “I’m a sports nut; when I see something new, I buy it,” he said, noting that all the items tell stories.

Some of the memorabilia is dedicated to Anderson’s father, Jimmy Anderson, who coached the OSU basketball team for 37 years. Among countless other items on display are “Rowdy” Roddy Piper’s pro-wrestling belt, football helmets and basketball jerseys. And, of course, golf keepsakes are on display, as Anderson was a Northwest Long-Drive champion, hitting the ball “farther than most humans,” he said. His longest drive was 399 yards. In fact, it was through golf that Anderson acquired the nickname “Big Daddy,” when one of the announcers at the championship event referred to him as Steve “Big Daddy” Anderson.

The building that houses Big Daddy’s is a historic Portland site that Anderson renovated. At first, Anderson painted the outside white, but after taggers struck, he decided to have a mural painted. He contacted his friend Samuel Gossen, a tattoo artist, and told him to “paint something pretty.” Gossen did just that, painting an eye-catching and colorful portrait of a woman with wavy tendrils of hair.

Big Daddy’s Badass Bento has two advertising slogans: “Bento reimagined” and “Not your middle school bento.” In addition, Anderson noted that although the food he serves is in a box, his menu offerings reveal that his thinking is “outside the box.”

Big Daddy’s Badass Bento
2141 SE Powell Blvd.
503.208.6626
bigdaddysbento.com
Open daily 11 am-4 pm

Steve “Big Daddy” Anderson gets ready to welcome customers to Big Daddy’s Badass Bento. Photo by John Richard Trtek.

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