

River Drive in Wallace, Michigan, these kind of orders actually happen. And while you're ordering your gourmet specialties you can look out the window of the ornate little mom and pop's operation and watch geese taking off on the Menominee River or maybe a deer is standing in the backyard. The place has that barbershop feel where hunters go in, sit down, and solve the world's problems while they are being serviced, in this case their venison is turned into a new kind of gold, gourmet food.

D + R Processing is named after Dave and Ruth Firnett who converted their garage and an adjoining room into one of the classiest venison operations in the Upper Midwest. It is not a giant operation, a peaceful place that currently processes about 200 deer a year, but it is top shelf when it comes to cleanliness and unique meat selections. The mouth-watering smells in their shop, (spices and herbs, bacon and cheese), lends itself to those of a gourmet deli. "If you like beef cuts," Dave says. "You'll like our gourmet venison. You can't tell if its beef or venison when we work it."

Dave and Ruth work in the meat department of a local food store, Dave as manager and Ruth as a meat wrapper. They have been working in the meat industry for 34 years. In



1996 their dream hobby became a reality when they opened up the shop that sits next to their house on the Menominee River. That first year they processed 27 deer. Since then word of mouth and repeat customers are keeping them on their toes from July through late April.

Although small in stature, D + R processing has all the amenities, namely a walk-in cooler and freezer, stainless steel vacuum tumblers, rail system for hauling, a grinder, cuber and a vacuum packaging machine. Where it really shines, in addition to the

regular venison cuts, is in the fact that it creates so many specialty meats. "These are the selections," according to Dave, "that even make venison attractive to those who shy away from eating wild game. It's venison made easy."

Dave is friendly and talkative while Ruth is quieter, but just as friendly. There is no doubt that they enjoy a customer's company. Customers are offered a chair if they choose to visit awhile. While there, the customer will notice that his or her deer is the only animal being worked on at that time, a real plus for a small operation. With so many years of mealpacking and gourmet meat processing experience, small has nothing but a positive connotation. Dave is so adept at his skill that he can place a deer on a hook, weigh it, and guess to within a few pounds of how much boneless meat, (everything is knife cut and boneless), a customer will get out of the deer. "It's usually about 4 grocery bags worth," Dave says.

Then Dave and Ruth start to work their magic. Sometimes they use one of the two tumblers for maria-

nating and tenderizing steaks. At other times they create buffalo chips by tumbling with hot wing seasoning, (In October of 2004 they created 300 pounds of buffalo chips alone). Sometimes they are creating venison choppies, a pork chop-like piece of venison that is prepared with bacon and barbecue seasoning. One item alone, their oven-ready mealloaf, accounts for a ton of venison each year.

Dave has created his own cookbook entitled Quality Deer Eating. At least 1,500 copies are already found in kitchens and camps as far away as California and Maine. Dave and Ruth also give seminars to sporting groups all over the U.P. and Northeast Wisconsin. And why shouldn't they. With over fifty years of experience between them, they have something to say that's worth digesting.

For more information contact Dave or Ruth at 906-863-1282 or visit their award-winning website; [www.best-venison.com](http://www.best-venison.com)

P.S.-the day of this writing I has the pleasure of sampling venison choppies, compliments of Dave and Ruth Firnett. If I'm lucky enough to get a deer this year, they'll be making some for me. Oh, and did I mention the mealloaf? .PPP

