

Where Beer & Beef Collide

Dixie's Biergarten Named the 2026 Iowa's Best Burger Winner

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Just like a lock and key, craft beer and delicious beef make the perfect pair. And that is exactly what you'll find in Decorah, Iowa, at this year's 2026 Iowa's Best Burger winner, Dixie's Biergarten.

Tucked into the bluffs of this outdoor adventure community, Dixie's Biergarten and owners Nick and Jordyn Harless bring a beefy smash burger with loads of juicy flavor to guests in a taproom setting.

Originally, the Toppling Goliath Brewing Co. taproom, Dixie's, continues to offer a cozy and comfortable atmosphere, featuring the best in Iowa craft beers with more than 25 on tap. However, unlike the original vision for the taproom, a dream led to serving food and the best burger in our state for 2026.

THE HISTORY

Interestingly, in the 70s, what is now Dixie's Biergarten was Burger Five, the first burger place in Decorah, and the only place you could grab a burger. Jordyn, a native of Decorah, said that the older locals have joked about how Dixie's has brought it full circle and is putting burgers back on the map in Decorah.

At some point, Toppling Goliath Brewing Co. acquired the space to use as their taproom, but no longer needed it when they built their new facility. In 2018, the owners reached out to Jordyn's parents, Troy and Chris, who had family ties, to purchase it. They named it Dixie's as an homage to their last name, Dixon, and asked their daughter, Jordyn, to manage it.

Nick entered the picture first as a customer, and then as a partnering food truck owner. His food truck, The Albatross, could

frequently be found parked outside Dixie's, serving their patrons. At some point, Nick and Jordyn fell in love, got married, and started a family.

In 2024, Nick and Jordyn purchased Dixie's. That fall, acting on a passion of Nick's, they began serving food. Not a small feat, as there was no kitchen on the property. Using what had been the storage room, Jordyn shared that Nick taped out his kitchen configuration on the floor, laughing about how she'd find him moving tape an inch this way or that to get it exactly right.

THE START

As the chef, Nick's cooking roots run deep. Early jobs working in kitchens fueled his interests and drive to learn more. He attributes his first real kitchen job at the Americana Grill and his boss for a lot of his growth.



At one point, he secretly entered Nick into a cooking contest in Des Moines, where Nick took home second place. It was while working at Americana that Nick's creativity and artistry of food began to flourish. He was coming up with new specials, and watching YouTube videos and food shows on TV to learn new things.

Nick also shared that his dad was a butcher, so he learned at an early age all about beef and what cuts of beef are the best and why. Nick understands the importance of quality, and he believes it is a big factor in why their burger stands out from others.

Eventually, a buddy approached Nick with an idea for a food truck. It took some convincing, but he agreed. The smaller food truck environment allowed him to lean into what was important to him – quality, fresh ingredients, sauces from scratch, fresh-cut fries, grinding his own meat, and more.

The Albatross, his food truck, was his full-time job for several years. This was also where his smash burger got its start. It was a grueling business model, Nick said – up early, out late, and hot. But he said it also helped him envision the kitchen space at Dixie's because he knew how to make it work in a small space like the food truck.

THE PAIR BEHIND THE BURGER

While Nick is the chef at Dixie's, it is apparent that Jordyn and Nick are both passionately committed to the business.

Jordyn also likes to cook, but she also enjoys helping come up with new ideas. Nick said she has an amazing talent for conceptualizing ideas or creating unique spin-offs.

They also agreed that as they added food to the mix, they wanted to be sure they did it right and did it well. There were many details that they teamed up on and considered as they added the kitchen and planned to add food. They wanted their

staff to be comfortable and not feel overwhelmed with the transition.

While they are a pair, Jordyn was quick to mention that they couldn't do it without their staff, some of whom have been with Dixie's since the beginning. They prioritize their staff because they are key to the business and the customer's overall experience.

Nick and Jordyn are looking forward to growing the business and what comes next. With a young family, they know what they have built is what will provide for their two girls. Nick is adamant that it is a future they are building and a blessing for their family.

However, he knows that it requires hard work, time, and sacrifice. There are things he and Jordyn tag-team on, and times Nick says he misses out. But right now, he says it is a foot-on-the-gas feeling; there will be a time when he can step back. He also points to his partnership with Jordyn. He says they are a team in the business, but more so when it comes to their family.

THE CONTEST

Jordyn said that the Best Burger contest had been on their radar for a while. With all of the feedback they'd received about the burger from food truck customers and now Dixie's patrons, they wanted to see how they stacked up against others.

Even with the food truck, they'd looked at the rules and determined that they needed to be open year-round, and the food truck didn't fit that. In 2024 at Dixie's, it felt too soon after launching food at the taproom. Jordyn said they had planned to be a little more intentional about promoting the contest and their participation this year.

As things tend to do in life, distractions popped up and took their focus away. Jordyn had printed off table tents to use to promote, and the staff might have mentioned the contest here or there to a customer who had a burger, but it didn't turn



out to be as intentional as they'd hoped. They said they were both shocked when they found out they were in the top 10!

Nick shared that their burger is traditionally their top seller, but since being announced as one of the top 10, their burger sales have doubled. For example, on a good burger day, like Friday or Saturday, they typically would sell 75 to 90 burgers before the contest, but on a recent Saturday after the announcement, they sold 153 burgers.

Jordyn and Nick also noted the uptick in awareness the contest has brought. From social influencers visiting to new guests, they anticipate the contest having lasting effects on their clientele.

The community has been very supportive. When they've been out, they'll get an "I voted for you." Jordyn said that the people of Decorah have really shown up for them. They hope that being named the winner brings a trickle effect to other Decorah businesses. Nick and Jordyn agree that Decorah has a lot to offer. If you plan to come to town to try their burger, they hope you'll stick around to shop, check out a brewery, take in a recreational activity, or eat a second meal at another of the great restaurants in town.

This year, we had the opportunity to deliver the winning news in person to Nick and Jordyn. There were happy tears all around. Nick described it as surreal. He said there is a lot of buildup to get to this point -- hours, hard work, attention to detail, and intention. He said that it is humbling and hugely validating. A proud moment!

continued on page 18

WHERE BEER AND BEEF COLLIDE

continued from page 17

THE BURGER (AND FRIES!)

The Biergarten Smashburger is the featured and only burger on the menu! Nick says he starts with a good-quality brioche bun, which is the vessel. Then comes their special SMASH sauce, a sauce Nick created during his food truck days. Then, high-quality beefsteak tomatoes, green leaf lettuce, and pickles. Obviously, the most important part of the burger is the beef!

They use a proprietary custom-blend that they get through their food distributor. Nick said it took a lot of sampling to find what they liked. The blend includes brisket chuck and is ground to a certain fat percentage. Nick attributes the brisket for the beefy flavor and the fat for keeping the burger juicy.



He uses two four-ounce balls smashed with parchment paper to get a nice, even smash. Then they season the patties and add finely shaved onions on top, so that when they flip the patties, the onions cook with the burger.

Nick prefers a smash burger and was among the first to introduce one to the area during his food truck days. In his opinion, it is all about the flavor. He feels the smash patty gives the right sear, or Maillard reaction. Nick says this gives a really hard and fast sear across the whole burger, converting the proteins and sugars to give a good depth of flavor and caramelization. He also feels they can season the burgers more consistently and layer flavors better.

There are differing opinions on smash burgers, and Nick agrees that a classic burger is nostalgic, but he thinks that smash burgers can rise to the challenge. That is one reason he was adamant about two four-ounce patties. It is a lot of beef! If you need something a little lighter, he said they will do a single smash patty.

Nick's philosophy is that if you are going to highlight the flavor of beef, you need to have enough of it to stand up to all the other things for a balanced bite. He wanted a burger that had intention, and that when guests remembered it, it was not because of extreme toppings, but because of the quality and freshness of the ingredients.

So fresh that they do not even have a freezer at Dixie's.

And while we are still on the food -- another little beef nugget for visitors, Dixie's serves fresh-cut French fries that are twice-fried in beef tallow. Delish!

THE IMPACT

It was important to Jordyn to maintain the sense of community that her parents envisioned as the foundation of Dixie's. A place where you could come hang out, share drinks, and talk with others. Serving great beer just happened to be a bonus. Nick and Jordyn hope to maintain that same feel, and adding food seemed like a natural way to evolve.

For Nick, his initial creativity and standards of freshness drive his day-to-day.

He and Jordyn have already begun several adjustments to prepare for additional customers from the contest and the usual uptick of summer visitors. They are looking forward to opening their outdoor patio soon as nicer weather approaches.

When you plan your visit to Dixie's Biergarten, keep in mind that the kitchen is open Wednesday through Saturday from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. The taproom is open seven days a week, but food is served only Wednesday through Saturday. Parking is limited in Dixie's parking lot. Additional parking is available along the streets across the road.

Please be patient. While we know that Nick, Jordyn, and their staff will do their best to serve customers quickly, there will likely be many people wanting to try Iowa's Best Burger. Remember that all food is made fresh. So, grab a beer, sit back, relax, and enjoy the experience!

Nick and Jordyn would like to thank their parents, Troy and Chris Dixon, and Steve and Jackie Harless, for helping them realize their dream. They would also like to thank and recognize their staff for all of their dedication and hard work, and Tim, their food distribution representative. Finally, they'd like to recognize their two sweet girls, Dorothy and Lilly...their why!

Congratulations, Nick, Jordyn, and the team at Dixie's Biergarten on being named the 2026 Iowa's Best Burger Contest winner.



DIXIE'S BIERGARTEN

310 College Dr. | Decorah, IA
www.dixiesbiergarten.com

Kitchen Hours:

Wednesday – Saturday
11:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Taproom open additional days/hours.

Please check our Facebook page for potential updates or announcements before coming.

Iowa's Best Burger Contest is facilitated and sponsored by the Iowa Beef Industry Council and the Iowa Cattlemen's Association.