

FALL 2023

RELISH

CITYVIEW'S GUIDE TO ALL THINGS DINING

PIG MEAT is what I(owa) CRAVES

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THE DISH

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PIG MEAT is what I(owa) CRAVES

No other protein has anything like the entourage of the pig.

By Jim Duncan

“Pig Meat Blues” by Leadbelly was not a blues song as much as a love song. “I Crave My Pig Meat” by Blind Boy Fuller, and “Pigmeat Is What I Craves” by Bo Carter further celebrated the love of pork by Southerners. Memphis Minnie had a hit with “Pig Meat on the Line.” like Lyle Lovett and Ry Cooder have more recently released songs with “pig meat” in the titles and love in the theme.

No other protein has anything like the entourage of the pig. Relish’s mission here is to take pig meat’s greatness away from Southerners and place it where it now deserves to be — in Iowa. Since WWII, pork has conquered beef as the state’s signature meat. As Iowa farmland became the most expensive in America, the cattle industry moved west to cheaper grazing pastures. We went from the country’s leading beef-producing state to No. 10.

Pork ribs and pulled pork at Whatcha Smokin’

Meanwhile, Iowa has been either first or second in pork production every year for the last two decades. With quantity increasing, quality took leaps of greatness. Two elite pork producers — Niman Pork and Berkwood Farms — were formed mostly with Iowa farmers who agreed to raise pigs under standards of humane husbandry. They also agreed to raise heritage breeds, mostly Duroc and Berkshire, that produce a fatter, better-tasting pig.

That was a response to a longtime industry strategy that portrayed pork as “the other white meat.” That was a slogan developed in the 1980s when cholesterol paranoia gripped the American public due to the misguided nutritional “discoveries” of the era — that cholesterol was the chief cause of heart disease.

Remember that medicine is the softest science and nutrition is the melted margarine of medicine. Most nutritional discoveries are debunked about 20 years later. So it was with that one. It turned out that trans fats (like margarine) are far more dangerous to cardio vascular health than cholesterol. The pork industry won market share with its lean white meat but created a product that was bred, often under inhumane conditions, to produce pork that had little flavor. That began with breeds created to go to market as fast and lean as possible.

When the public woke up to the cholesterol misinformation, it wanted better-tasting pork. Niman led that movement, and top restaurants from San Francisco to New York City began serving Niman pork exclusively. Niman pigs are raised with pasture access so they are happy pigs. As Niman Pork head Paul Willis put it, “Our pigs only have one bad day in their lives.”

Herb and Kathy Eckhouse then started La Quercia, which quickly became the country’s most honored charcuterie maker. Their pig meat rivals that of the best Italian and Spanish pork processors in world competitions. They even found a pig farmer to raise hogs on acorn diets — the historic diet of the famous prosciutto pigs of Parma, where the Eckhouses lived for years.

La Quercia (the oak in Italian) has expanded their line of European-style charcuterie products. Besides prosciutto (acorn version or regular), they have Iberico products from the legendary Spanish Mangalitsa pigs. They make lomo (tenderloin); coppa, which is like prosciutto but made from whole shoulders, not hams, guanciale (cheeks), N’duja (spicy paste of prosciutto), pancetta (belly), and five salamis. Super collections of La Quercia products can be found at Cheese Shop (833 42nd St.), Proudfoot & Bird (1000 Walnut St.), Eatery A (2932 Ingersoll Ave.), and Centro (1003 Locust St.).

Iowa bacon upgraded with companies like Vande Rose leading the ascension. Bacon critic Scott Gold on Time Inc. named that Iowa company the maker of America’s best bacon. Des Moines bacon fans started a Bacon Festival that grew exponentially for



Carnitas and pastor tacos with a cantaritos at La Familia

years. Iowa State Historical Society Director Leo Landis, aka “Professor of Bacon,” determined to visit every Iowa locker and factory to taste their bacons. Pig meat is the future of Iowa food history as well as the past.

Immigrants and pig meat

In Des Moines, pepperoni and Italian sausage are the most preferred pizza toppings. Here, as many chefs make Bolognese with pork as with beef, and osso buco is as often made with pork as with veal. Tony Lemmo’s famous cavatelli are made with pork. The Iowa Cubs serve hot dogs made by Berkwood Farms.

Iowa also has the most pig meat diversity in America. Thank Gov. Bob Ray for that. He made Iowa a sanctuary for Asian

immigrants from the Vietnam War, and that attracted Latin Americans. They both brought rich pork culture with them. Vietnam's pork consumption accounts for 65% of its protein.

When CITYVIEW inaugurated our Ultimate Food Challenges, the first winner was the breaded pork tenderloin (BPT) at B&B Meat, Grocery and Deli. That sandwich is rather unique to Iowa. (Indiana also claims to be its founder.)

BLT

Probably Iowa's greatest contribution to pig meat greatness is the bacon, lettuce and tomato sandwich (BLT). This is a universal delight, unlike the BPT, but it reaches superior status in Iowa every summer when the rich black soil produces the best tomatoes, especially since Decorah's Seed Savers Exchange began propagating stunning heirloom varieties of tomatoes, now commonly sold at farmers markets, co-ops and grocery stores in the Hawkeye state.

Bakeries like La Mie and South Union upgraded the bread. Green grocers, inspired by the Seed Savers revolution, have made the "lettuce" grown here as variegated as anywhere. If the BPT is not the favorite sandwich of Iowa, it surely is the BLT.

Some reasons why Iowa is pig meat's citadel

BBQ culture has transformed Des Moines with Flying Mango (4345 Hickman Ave.), Whatcha Smokin? (Highway 17, Luther) and many Jethro's leading the way. Pork ribs and pulled pork shoulders rival brisket as the most popular offerings.

Graziano Brothers (1601 S. Union Ave.) has specialized in Italian pork sausage for 111 years. Their deli features the grinder that is synonymous with Des Moines. It stars the fennel-rich sausage of Francesco and Luigi Graziano with fried peppers, Mozzarella and sauce on a Fancy Breads roll. Deli sandwiches employ coppa, ham, mortadella, salami, pepperoni, prosciutto, hot soppressata and mild soppressata. All those pig meats are part of the Italian Des Moines legacy.

Asian splendor

Cha Gio, as served at Pho All Seasons (1311 E. Euclid Ave.), are a fabulous version of egg rolls stuffed with roast pork and taro paste. That restaurant also offers spring rolls made with grilled pork, cured pork or shredded pork. Five spice pork chops come with choices of quiche or sunny-side eggs with shredded pork, plus pork pate. Their crepes are stuffed with pork, shrimp and vegetables.

At Pho 515 (801 University Ave.), Quang Ni noodles are served with pork riblets and pork belly. Their Biet banh mi are made with pork loaf, ham and head cheese. They stuff French



Pork crepes at Pho 515.

crepes with pork and other things.

Most Vietnamese cafés in Des Moines serve banh mi, a legendary sandwich that the French brought to Indo China. It is served with multiple kinds of pork, vegetables, pickled and fresh, on a baguette made with rice flour instead of wheat. Pho 515's bakery makes most of these baguettes for the whole city.

Eat Thai, Thai Eatery (1821 22nd St., West Des Moines) serves grilled marinated pork in chilies, or with any of six different curry pastes with coconut milk, or with myriad noodle or rice dishes. Most Thai places make dumplings, spring rolls and egg rolls with chicken rather than pork but Cool Basil (1250 Eighth St., Clive) offers pork salad as well as chicken or beef salads.

Le's Chinese BBQ (1200 Sixth Ave.) looks like a BBQ in San Francisco Chinatown with whole BBQ pigs hanging and sold by the pound or smaller. You can even specify what part of the pig you want. That's a service I have only found in West Tennessee and East Carolina, and it's disappearing in both those spots.

Fawn's (1107 E. University Ave.) makes egg rolls with pork and offers pork versions of 25 dishes. TNT (3452 MLK Pkwy.) is probably the most pork centric of Des Moines' Southeast Asian restaurants. They offer shredded pork skin sandwiches, pork hash in rice paper, thit kho trung cut (pork stew with quail eggs),

red pork noodle soups (my grandson tells me that's more Cambodian than Vietnamese), pork ribs and pork chops. One pork chop comes with shredded pork topping. They also stuff crepes with pork.



The Iowa breaded pork tenderloin. This one is from Newton's in Waterloo.

China is by far the world's greatest consumer of pig meat, both total and per capita. Its per capita consumption rate is increasing about 4% a year as the Chinese become more prosperous. Shang Yuen (5717 Hickman Road) offers 10 pork specialties on its menu, not even including noodle and fried rice dishes. So does Dragon House East (2470 E. Euclid Ave.). Wong's Chopsticks (5500 Merle Hay Road, Johnston) offers 12, plus dim sum service on weekends. They make shu mai and potstickers with pork. (Many in Des Moines prefer chicken.)

One Des Moines favorite is moo shu pork. It is made with pork, mushrooms, cucumber and eggs, plus other variables. The name is Chinese for the "osmanthus tree," which is said to blossom in the color of egg yolks. It is often eaten with pancakes. In Des Moines, even upscale restaurants like Harbinger (2724 Ingersoll Ave.) take inspiration from Asia with steamed bun pork belly looking a lot like moo shu pork. They also make their own lemongrass pork sausage.

The Japanese version of the BPT is ton katsu, a delicious pork cutlet Panko battered and deep fried. Miyabi 9 (512 E. Grand Ave.) and Akebono 515 (215 Tenth St.) offer good versions. Akebono also grills pork belly. Sakura (1960 Grand Ave., West Des Moines) serves a pork dumpling soup.

Puerco

Mexican cuisine prefers beef and chicken to pork, but its pork dishes are elaborate. Many local places make carnitas and pastor. Pastor came to Mexico with Syrian immigrants and is a pig meat version of schwarma and gyros. Usually, it is made by stacking pork steaks, often with onions and pineapple, then grilling it on a rotisserie and slicing from the outside.

Carnitas preparations vary. Often it is simply roasted pork shoulder, but sometimes it is deep fried after roasting or brazing for crispness. These can usually be served red or green, in tacos, or tortas, straight up or soaked in sauce and fried.

Or red and green, because it is always Christmas for pig meat in Iowa. ■

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THE

BOOMERAZON

EFFECT

By Jim Duncan

“The inevitable never happens. It is the unexpected always.”

That quote is usually ascribed to novelist Dame Margaret Drabble, but it is associated with several of history’s great economic thinkers. Whether applied to romantic expectations for happiness or to predicting economic futures, the point is that overconfidence is fool hearty. History’s most “indestructible” investments — from the “Eternal City” of the Caesars to the Maginot Line of post WWI France — are often upset in the blink of an eye.

**What goes away,
comes back in
the food world.**

Ruth’s Chris Steakhouse brings 15,000 square feet of fine dining splendor to the corner of Jordan Creek and Ashworth

It is the unexpected always. The Americas were accidentally discovered by navigators seeking a short cut to the spices of the East Indies. The brutal leaders of the French Revolution never delivered “fraternalite, egalite and liberte” but did bring the world its first restaurants. After Robespierre and his Reign of Terror killed all the nobles, their unemployed cooks needed work.

The chocolate brownie was discovered when a 19th century cook, probably drunk, at the Palmer House in Chicago forgot to add yeast to his chocolate cake. Similarly, the great Italian wine Amarone was discovered when winemakers bungled a vintage of Reciota. The grapes did not achieve the desired over-ripening and, hence, could not fully ferment. That meant that their sugars all turned to alcohol and the Reciota had none of its expected sweetness. A good, sweet wine became a great, dry wine.

The sandwich was invented because the Earl of Sandwich had so many problems, both with politics and with his multiple wives and loves, that he had no time to eat. So he instructed his cook to put salad, entrée and sauce between two slices of bread.

James Michener’s “Chesapeake” tells a centuries-long tale of geese flying over the bay. When settlements replaced wild lands nearby, the birds left their hunting path for lack of food. Then after WWII, tomato harvesting switched from efficient human pickers to machines that left a large percentage of the harvest to rot in the fields. The geese returned to feast.

John Steinbeck’s “Cannery Row” tells the story of Monterrey Bay and how it thrived when WWI created huge demand for canned sardines. Then suddenly after WWII, oceanic changes and overfishing chased sardines from the local waters, and the industry became a museum for tourists. Today, the sardine is back to full population and Monterrey has the world’s most influential aquarium — because it tracks fish populations and alerts people about endangered species.

Similarly, the world’s greatest anchovies swam for centuries undisturbed in the Cantabrian Sea. Then a shipwreck of Sicilians, who had been salting lesser anchovies since Phoenician times, brought the knowledge to the Basque Country, and generations of Sicilians emigrated to the Euskadi to troll little fishes.

Such accidents of food history are legion. The founder of the



Niman Pork chief Paul Willis led the back to the future movement to humanely raised, better tasting pork.

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Italian supermarkets Eataly, Oscar Farinetti, has collected tales of accidental food inventions in his book “Serendipity.” Among the happy accidents we love to eat today: yogurt, balsamic vinegar, ice wine, popcorn, Gorgonzola, Champagne, rum and tofu.

Those of us who invest our lives in the food business know that everything is cyclical. If we live long enough, most of that which goes away comes back. When Babe’s closed in 1991, the word-of-mouth zeitgeist was that this was the end of times.

Downtown dining was supposed to be a thing of the past. Why would anyone go there for dinner, or shopping, when malls provided free parking and compact collections of shopping and dining options? For a decade in the early life of Merle Hay Mall, Bishops Cafeteria was the busiest restaurant in the state. Today, that mall’s food court is disintegrating after rents were raised and traffic decreased. Chrissy Johnson has moved her Joppa Experience to River Bend, where there were no restaurants for a recent decade, but now La Familia and Pho 515 thrive.

Downtown dining was not dead for long. By the end of the 1990s, Bruce Gerleman had opened Splash and begun the rebirth of Court Avenue District as a dining and entertainment center. By 2003, Centro opened in the Western Gateway with George Formaro as executive chef. Owners had interviewed eight restaurateurs, and Formaro was the only one who believed that the Temple venue could draw people downtown for dinner, not just lunch.

THE DEATH AND REBIRTH OF BREW PUBS

In the late 1970s, numerous brew pubs opened nationally, and almost all failed in a few years. The wisdom of the moment was that customers would try a craft beer but then go back to the comfort of Bud or Miller’s lower prices. Brew pubs were written off as a terrible idea.

Then Scott Carlson opened Court Avenue Brewing Company (CABCO) in 1997 and began a state-wide craft beer craze that led to multiple festivals, 115 Iowa breweries, and the magic of Full Court Press, a group of local partners who have created Hessen Haus, Red Monk, Royal Mile, Fong’s Pizza, Mullets, High Life Lounge, Buzzard Billy’s, Iowa Taproom, Ken’s, Rita’s Cantina, Lucky Horse, and The Chicken, all featuring Iowa craft beers.

Lua, Big Grove, Confluence, Firetrucker, 515, Twisted Vine, Peace Tree, Back Road, Reclaimed Rails, Exile, Brightside Ale Works, Barntown, West Hill, Uptown Garage and Fenders have all opened taprooms in metro Des Moines since CABCO. If you want your craft beer served ironically, 300 MLK occupies the Old Tavern Brewing Company. That Des Moines brewery closed when Prohibition raised its judgmental eyebrows. Now it hosts 300 Craft & Rooftop, plus Fuzzy’s Tacos, Blaze Pizza, Jimmy John’s and The Poke Company.



Salad bars, like this one at Chicago Speakeasy, are cafeterias with some limitations.

THE NEW CAFETERIAS

Some things that seem to go away actually just morph. The cafeterias of the malls’ great era were replaced by all-you-can-eat buffets. You pay a fixed price rather than ordering just what you want, but you can still eyeball everything you choose to put on your plate. The only things missing are the trays.

Some cafeterias in Des Moines, including Bishops and Old World Country, tried to transform into “all you can eat” places, but that didn’t track. The successful ones are usually either South Asian- or Chinese-themed. Lzaza, which is Pakistani, India Star, Chowrastha and the Nepalese Kathmandu operate them for lunch only. Kathmandu’s is weekends only; the others are weekdays only.

Chinese-themed buffets are served at International Buffet, New China Buffet & Grill, Hibachi Grill & Supreme Buffet, and China Buffet in the metro. They are open for lunch and dinner every day. Some say that Panda and Hy Vee’s Chinese services are cafeterias because all the dishes are usually visible behind glass.

Though COVID panic decimated their numbers, salad bars are cafeterias with limitations. The ones at Terra Grill, Chicago Speakeasy, Arugula & Rye, Jason’s Deli, Ruby Tuesday, Chicken Ranch, John & Nick’s Steaks and Prime Rib, and Whole Foods have many fans.

Sometimes populations recreate markets for old-time revivals. Pork farming in Iowa is a great example of that. For the most part, before WWII, most pigs were raised outdoors with shelter from bad weather. That is more humane but less efficient. When pork became industrial, pigs lived lives of horror and torture in confinements so packed that the animals often eat each other’s tails. Confinements also produce filth that runs into our waterways and fouls the air for miles.

A demand arose for old fashioned pork, with more fat and less stress on the animal. Iowa-based Niman Pork and Berkwood Farms filled the need. Heritage breeds like Duroc and Berkshire are returning to old population numbers.

SLOW FOOD AND FINE DINING RETURN

Also after WWII, fast food exploded, and fine dining was deemed doomed. It took decades, but there was finally resistance. Slow food is a thing now. Seed Savers Exchange in Winneshiek County is one of that movement's poster children. And the fine art of the three-hour dinner is back. Many local restaurants present special dinners with just one seating. They feature multiple courses and usually offer wine or beer pairings with each course. Centro uses the former South Union Bread space to accommodate these dinners. Django created the Reinhardt Room for theirs.

This year brings us two of the most eagerly anticipated fine dining restaurants in metro history. When the developers of the Jordan Creek Town Center were building that mall, they offered many incentives to Ruth's Chris Steak House. The Texas-based luxury chain deemed West Des Moines too small for its brand.

In August, Ruth's Chris Steakhouse opened its largest-ever store on Jordan Creek Parkway. That place has a whopping 15,000 square feet over two floors and seats 450. Heated patios and tablecloth dining is back, and steaks cost up to \$150, a la carte.

Ruth Fertel opened the first Ruth's Chris with a \$4,000 loan. The West Des Moines store has scores of chandeliers that cost \$3,000 to \$4,000 each, plus one that costs \$30,000.

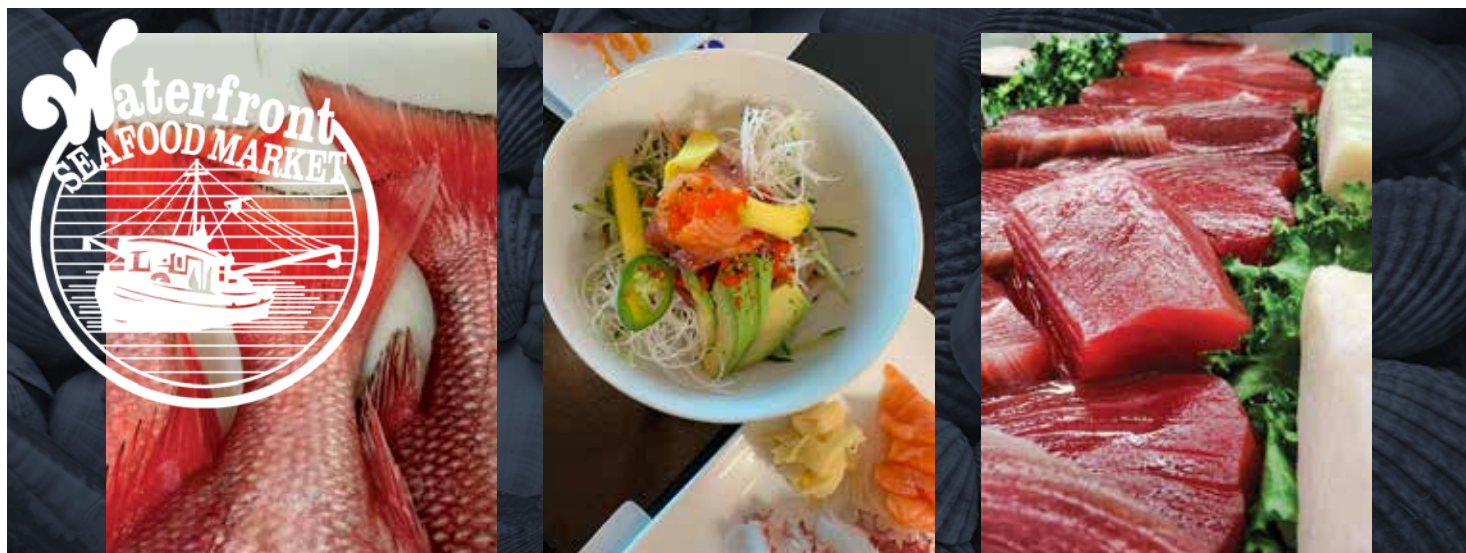
OAK PARK

In mid-October, Oak Park will open on Ingersoll Avenue. That gem has its own giant garden. It will grow, harvest, can and pickle its bounty mostly from Seeds Savers starters. The restaurant's stunning Prairie architecture, by Brad Hartman of Hartman/Trapp, features more natural light than any restaurant in town, unless you consider the coffee bar in Kum & Go headquarters a restaurant. About 80% of the seating will be in its solarium, a three-sided polygon facing south, east and west and surrounding its bar room. That bar has a zinc-covered top.

Among the features that harken back to yesteryear is a chef's table off the kitchen that will seat six. It has an oval shape so that no guest has his back to the kitchen. Like all the kitchen, it has wonderful windows. Yes, windows in the kitchen, for the morale of the staff who work there.

Owner Kathy Fehrman explains, "Most restaurants consider only the customer when they design. We wanted to also be mindful of the employee. We have employee lockers, an employee restroom and an enclosed area out back where they can smoke. Also, that hides smokers and dumpsters from the neighborhood and parking lot."

General Manager Damon Murphy came from 801 Steak &



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Chop House. He says he's never seen such attention paid to detail.

"The tiled kitchen is state of the art. We went to Barcelona to find our alternative oven/grills. They can burn charcoal or hard wood and have adjustable heights. The French-style flat tops were custom built in Virginia. The pastry kitchen is a room to itself."

"When (pastry chef) Jess (Dunn) first saw it, she threw herself on top and hugged everything," added Fehrman.

The bathrooms are all unisex private rooms with moss green walls. Care was also paid to the suppliers.

Basement stairs contain a slide so that deliveries can be made without bumping down each step.

"The best decision we made in planning was to assemble the entire crew seven months before opening," Fehrman said.

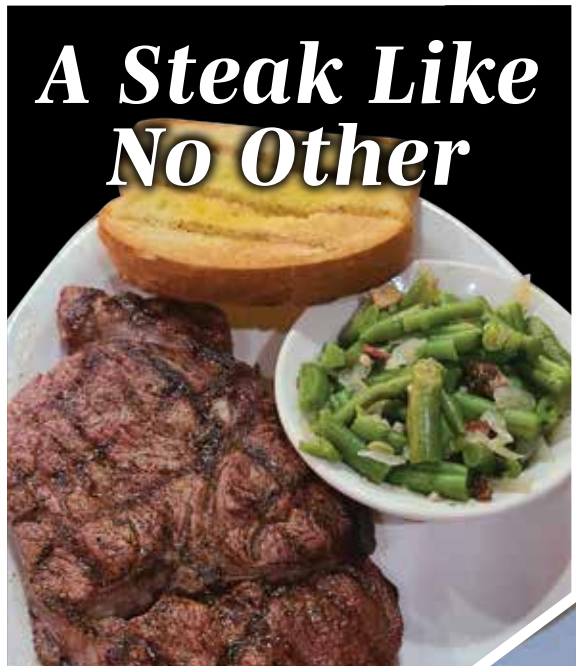
They have been working on the menu all that time in their downtown test kitchen. Seven staff members went to sommelier certification school. They will train others to recommend 2,500



Oak Park, designed by Brad Hartman, will feature Prairie architecture and more natural light than any restaurant in town. Photo courtesy of Oak Park

different wines, with a 9,000-bottle wine cellar.

The menu will have about 30 items, according to Murphy, plus a five-course tasting menu. Fehrman took the staff to some out-of-town restaurants she admires, like Alinea in Chicago and V Mertz in Omaha. She smiled when she mentioned that the kitchens in those places are tiny compared to Oak Park. ■



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Take your date on a **CULINARY ADVENTURE**

**TRAVEL THE CONTINENTS AT
DES MOINES RESTAURANTS**

By Cyote Williams

The traditional dine-out date night is a classic that couples have enjoyed for generations, but that doesn't mean it can't be improved upon. Thankfully, CITYVIEW has come up with a way to spice up or sweeten your night of indulgence around Des Moines. Iowa's capital city goes under the radar when it comes to the tapestry of flavors woven within its borders. Here's your guide through an innovative dining experience across five different continents. (Sorry, Australia and Antarctica.)

EUROPEAN

European cuisine takes on many forms and flavors across the continent. Famed French bakeries, English breakfasts, Belgian waffles, Swedish chocolate and Italian dinners and culture — just to name a few — have their roots intertwined throughout the metro.

APPETIZER: La Mie Bakery

841 42nd St., Des Moines

www.lamiebakery.com/bakery

La Mie Bakery has been routinely voted as Des Moines' best bakery by CITYVIEW readers. Pick up a freshly baked pillowy loaf from this French bakery to nibble on as you make your way to the next location.

Entree: Tumea & Sons

1501 S.E. First St., Des Moines

www.tumeaandsons.net

A rich history accompanied by rich

flavors. Voted best local Italian food by CITYVIEW readers. For 25 years, this restaurant has been serving Italian classics including several veal dishes, manicotti, chicken marsala and more.

Dessert: Chocolaterie Stam

2814 Ingersoll Ave., Des Moines

www.stamchocolate.com

Fine European chocolates right here in Iowa's capital city. Chocolate or gelato are more than fine options to end your dining experience.

Drinks: Louie's Wine Dive

4040 University Ave., Suite A, Des Moines

www.louieswinedive.com

Wine, cocktails, beer, sangria — it's not up to us what you drink, but whichever decision you make, Louie's will cater to your drink needs in award-winning fashion.



Louie's Wine Dive

ASIAN

Asian cuisine and dining have been steadily growing in the Des Moines food scene for decades. With a plethora of countries, cultures and flavors represented by restaurants across the metro, diners will be spoiled for choice.

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Appetizer: Lucky Lotus

2721 Ingersoll Ave., Des Moines
www.luckylotusdsm.com

Lucky Lotus can start your night off with a bang. Enhanced salads that bring authentic flavors, the Crispy Rice Wraps or the Bing Bing Wrap will fire your tastebuds on all cylinders.

Entree: Spices of Nepal

4804 S.W. Ninth St., Des Moines
www.spicesofnepal.com

Tucked away on the southside hides a gem of an Indian and Nepalese restaurant. Homemade recipes ranging from tandoori bread, curry, lamb and more will give you a taste of the Himalayas.

Dessert: Crème

543 28th St., Des Moines
www.cremecupcake.com

Des Moines' first Asian-inspired bakery does not disappoint. Try freshly baked



Crème

milk breads, lemon bars, cupcakes and more sweet treats.

Drinks: Fong's Pizza

223 Fourth St., Des Moines
fongspizza.com

Fong's boasts a wide range of cocktail options that feature an Asian twist, a new feature cocktail each month, frozen Mai Tais and more.

LATINO & HISPANIC

While there is some crossover between these two culinary worlds, they are not the same. However, where the two do intersect makes up the largest minority population in Des Moines, and their flavorful influence is heavily reflected in the city's food scene.

Appetizer: Mi Patria

1410 22nd St., West Des Moines
www.mipatriadsm.com

An abundance of tasteful Ecuadorian starters that are packed full of flavor, choose between the empanadas with your choice of filling, patacones with cheese dip, their papa serrano and more.

Entree: La Cuscatleca South

2580 Fleur Drive, Suite 101, Des Moines
www.lacuscatlecasouth.com

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Dessert: Monarca

9901 University Ave., Suite 150, Clive
www.monarcapaletas.com
Monarca's focus is on paletas, which are ice cream popsicles. The Mexican dessert offers a wide range of possibilities for customization. Pick your paleta flavor, then your dipping, a topping and a drizzle to top it off.



Monarca

Drinks: Ceviche Bar

223 E. Walnut St., Des Moines
This Cuban restaurant and bar is an excellent stop to end your night with several cocktails including mules, mojitos, martinis and Mexican beers with multiple styles of Modelo or Corona.

AFRICAN & MEDITERRANEAN

African and Mediterranean cuisine is continuing to gain a foothold in Des Moines. While there still are only a few to choose from in the metro, it does not diminish the bold and rich flavors you can experience from these dishes.

Appetizer: Home Touch Kitchen

1552 E. Grand Ave., Suite D, Des Moines
www.facebook.com/HomeTouchKitchen
Warming soups, fufu, jollof and other rice plates, not to mention the chance at some freshly baked breads, are all a possibility to get your night of dining started.

Entree: Taste of Africa

2500 Martin Luther King Jr. Parkway, Suite 3, Des Moines
www.facebook.com/tasteofafricadmi
This restaurant has no shortage of options for traditional, homemade African meals. With tandoori chicken, samosas, goat, lamb and fluffy basmati rice to enjoy alongside, a taste of Africa is certainly what you'll get.

Dessert: The Green Olive

4221 Fleur Drive, Des Moines | www.thegreenolivedsm.com
While African and Mediterranean desserts are hard to come by in the city, you'll find some at The Green Olive: a flakey yet sweet baklava, cheesecake and a rich and creamy flan.

Buy one 1/4 pound BACON CHEESEBURGER and medium soft drink and get one 1/4 pound BACON CHEESEBURGER **FREE!**



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251 NE Cypress Drive, Grimes

Drinks: Eatery A

2932 Ingersoll Ave., Des Moines | www.eateryadsm.com
At Eatery A, you'll find expert choices between white and red wines with Mediterranean origins and house-made cocktails from palomas to martinis and back.

AMERICAN

American cuisine can be difficult to define since some of the country's most iconic dishes originate from around the globe. Despite its relatively young age compared to the rest of civilization, plenty of soulful, comforting and downright delicious meals have originated right here in the U.S.

Appetizer: Bubba

200 10th St., Des Moines | www.bubbadsm.com
With options ranging from mac 'n cheese bites, loaded potato skins, a southern bread basket and more, their appetizers will make it difficult for you to leave.

Entree: Lachele's Fine Foods

2716 Ingersoll Ave., Des Moines | www.lacheles.com
The smashburger at Lachele's will make any mouth water with its crispy edges and savory and seasoned patty nestled between bun choices ranging from potato rolls to sesame buns and Texas toast. You'll have no trouble finding one to satisfy your burger craving.



Lachele's Fine Foods

Dessert: Classic Frozen Custard

4000 S.E. 14th St., Des Moines
This iconic southside establishment stays open till 10 p.m. in the summer with rotating flavors, homemade ice cream, shakes, malts, cones and sundaes, the creamy treat is an American staple.

Drinks: El Bait Shop

200 S.W. Second St., Des Moines
www.elbaitshop.com
Beer, beer and more beer. The hoppy beverage didn't originate in the U.S., but it has certainly been co-opted over the years. Inside of El Bait Shop, you'll be faced with 251 selections of beer on draft including many Iowa-based brewery creations. ■

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Inflation dominates food news again

By Jim Duncan

For the fourth time since the elections of 2020, inflation was the dominant food story. Food inflation continued to outpace general inflation in the U.S., the U.K. and Europe in every month this semester. If you want to feel better about that, the rise in food prices is almost twice as high in Europe as in the U.S. Russia's war with Ukraine is the main reason for that, but food inflation totally outpaced general inflation in the U.S. for the fifth straight semester.

The end of that is not yet visible. Russia broke off its Black Sea Accord, which would have allowed more grain exports, particularly to starving populations in Africa. India, by far the world's largest rice exporter, banned all non-basmati rice exports, causing hoarding and inflation as far as Texas. Though inflation in food is still growing, it's not growing as fast as it was two years ago. Not sure that is something to feel better about, but a lot of politicians think we should.

Other COVID-era trends continued after shutdowns ended. The whiskey market hit a record \$10 billion last year in the U.S. American whiskey continued to be the leading subcategory with 53% of total sales. It was followed by Canadian whisky (24%), Irish whiskey (17%), Scotch (6%) and the fast-growing Japanese whiskies (0.3%). Also, women continued a decade-long move to equal men in problem drinking and total booze consumption, narrowing the gap every year since 2020.

Food inflation always wreaks havoc on restaurants. **Jenny Lee's Korean and American Restaurant** closed after a rent increase just one year after her opening in West Des Moines... Quad Cities-based **Barrel House** closed their East Village brew pub after less than a year here... Jerry Talerico closed **Tally Ho to Go** in the Merle Hay Mall. Chrissy Johnson moved her **Joppa Experience** from Merle Hay Mall to Sixth Avenue in the River Bend area, after a rise in rent and a slowdown in traffic... **SingleSpeed Brewing** opened at 303 Scott St... **Lua** announced it was expanding to a second store on the west end of Grand Avenue in Des Moines, in front of the soccer fields.

THE GOOD NEWS

There was also lots of optimism for the restaurant scene. MJ Gazali opened **MJ's Hollywood** in Adel, with a return to Golden Age Tinsel Town glam and a superb Lebanese menu... **Ruth's Chris Steakhouse** opened its biggest ever store in West Des Moines a little more than a decade after rejecting West Des Moines' demographics... The Lafayette, Louisiana-based chicken chain **Krispy Krunchy** opened their first Iowa store in a liquor store on 22nd in West Des Moines. They are similar to Chester's with no stand-alone stores... **Flame Taqueria** opened its third area café, in Bondurant... **Chowrastha** opened on Ashworth Road in West Des Moines with a lunch buffet... **Doc Holliday's Road-house**, based in Williston, North Dakota, announced it would take over the Drake area Jethro's... **Panka Peruvian Chicken** took over the former Fong's Pizza in the Drake neighborhood... **Tullpa** opened a Peruvian café at 3708 Merle Hay Road... **Dave & Buster's** opened in the Jordan Creek neighborhood... **DZÓ** opened a Korean steakhouse on Ingersoll Avenue.

ANKENY NEWS

Luddy's Tavern is coming to 106 S.W. State St. The German-American restaurant is still working on an opening date for German-inspired cocktails and fare. Other restaurants on the way include: a second **Club Car Restaurant & Lounge** at 3607 N.E. Otterview Circle, which should be open by the time you read this; **Mullets** with a rooftop patio, in Uptown; **Uptown Dairy**, which will serve Cedar Crest Ice Cream from Wisconsin, in the same Ankeny Market Village as Mullets; **Early Bird**, the brunch specialist, at 1520 S. Ankeny Boulevard.; and a third location for **The Breakfast Club**.

TRENDS

Wall Street Journal reported that **tipping prompters** have spread from restaurants and bars to juice shops, appliance repair firms and plant and flower shops. They found 16% of all businesses now request tips, up from 6% two years ago. WSJ suggested that companies are trying to pass wage-paying on to customers. This writer was prompted to tip 18% to 30% on a recent T-shirt purchase. ■

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