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CITYVIEW'S GUIDE TO ALL THINGS DINING

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GARDENS — NOT JUST FOR THE BACKYARD

Restaurant gardens have been revived from a deep sleep that began more than 50 years ago.

THE RETURN OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD JOINT

Across the metro, restaurants are serving the needs of their neighbors with a generous dash of nostalgia baked in.

The ins and outs
of some of your
favorite local
coffee shops

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Gardens

— not just for the backyard

Farmers markets are popular in all counties, and restaurant gardens have been revived from a deep sleep that began more than 50 years ago.

By Jim Duncan

Between America's two mightiest rivers, Iowa was handcrafted by serendipity. Incredible fertility was dumped upon it by glaciers of the last Ice Age. Early farmers marveled that they had found a place where they cleared out more birds' nests than stones in their fields. Today, Iowa is home to more prime farmland than any place on Earth, one-fourth of all of America's.

Hugh Sidey, a Greenfield native who penned a column in

Time magazine for 40 years, traveled with John F. Kennedy's 1960 campaign to be president. After being asked if he liked coming home to Iowa, Sidey told JFK "Sure, it's home. You have to understand the prairie."

Kennedy reflected and said, "My life is beaches and oceans, but I always remember something Robert Frost said — 'It's a shame to grow crops and run them through animals for food.' Because that black soil looks good enough to eat."

The state was agriculturally diverse from statehood in 1845 through World War II. It was a national leader in grape production in the 1920s. Sorghum, wheat, beets and apples created industries here. The typical farm in the early 20th century included pigs, horses, dairy cows, cattle, orchards, wild berries and bountiful gardens.

Iowa fared better than most states during the Great Depression because its population was mostly rural then. Country folk could live off the land. When I drove my grandfather to his former farm in rural O'Brien County for a last look at what had been his farm, he was deeply disturbed by the changes he witnessed after 40 years away. "Where are the cows?" "Where are the pigs?" "What happened to the horses?" "Why would they cut down my orchards?"

Like Kennedy and Frost, he believed it was shameful to redirect the use of that rich black dirt from diversity to the duality of corn and beans that would be run through animals to make food for humans.

GARDEN REVIVAL

During WWII, Iowans planted victory gardens in both rural and urban environments. But the lure of inexpensive meats, poultry and eggs turned most away from the labor of turning over soil and nourishing seeds into fruits and vegetables. Massive government subsidies for corn and bean farming, by every administration of both major political parties, cheapened their end products. Corn sweetener became so cheap that the U.S. sugar market nearly disappeared. Hardly any Americans continued to plant sugar cane, even in Hawaii. And sugar beets, once a huge thing in northwest Iowa, became insignificant.

The signal event in this strange story of governmental price manipulation came in the early 1980s when the entire soft drink industry quit using sugar because high fructose corn sweeteners (HFCS) were so much cheaper.

After a couple decades of HFCS abuse, medical analysts noticed that obesity and diabetes rates began rising continuously after the change in soft drink recipes.

Sugar-sweetened soft drinks returned after a last-minute deal before the Bush administration gave way to the Obama administration in 2008. The U.S. lifted tariffs on Mexican sugar, and Mexico allowed more HFCS into their country.

About the same time, home gardens and farmers markets



Cafe di Scala has three gardens to support its Calabrese heritage.

began propagating. Southwestern Wisconsin carved out a niche market for diversity of small crops thanks to the Madison Farmers Market, proclaimed the best in America by the late R.W. Apple, who was both the chief political commentator and "food writer at large" for the New York Times for four decades.

Wisconsin's new claim to fame spilled into northeast Iowa where the Decorah Farmers Market became a guide for bigger ones in Iowa City and later in Des Moines. Those markets were elevated by two visionary farmers — Bobby Braverman in Iowa City and Larry Cleverley in Des Moines. Now farmers markets are popular in all counties, and restaurant gardens have been revived from a deep sleep that began more than 50 years ago.



Visionary farmer Larry Cleverley

RESTAURANT GARDENS

The late Ralph Compiano said, when he began working in the family restaurant business in the 1950s, Fleur Drive was still half rural. In fact, his family's restaurant raised their chicken dinners in the backyard. The restaurant wasn't even in Des Moines then. The city limits were at Watrous. Ralph gardened his entire life, growing peppers and other seeds that his family carried to Iowa from Italy.

Tony Lemmo carries on this tradition in Aposto at Café di Scala. He has three gardens there, and they supply his restaurant.

“One garden is perennials. I do this to ensure that we have a supply of heirloom vegetables that ancestors brought from that part of Calabria that most of us (Italian-Americans) in Des Moines came from.”

Archie’s Waeside in Le Mars, probably Iowa’s most renowned steak house, has had a garden on premises for decades. It aids a relish tray (that includes house-cured corned beef) and salad service that attracts pilot clubs to the airfield there.

Orlando’s made salads from their on-premise garden on Park Avenue for their entire time there. Bars and cafés in Des Moines have been the happy hosts of vegetable exchanges and giveaways for decades. Tom Arnold, in his stand-up days before Hollywood fame, told a joke about Iowa nice.

“In Iowa, you have to be sure to lock your cars at the mall in summer. Otherwise, people will break in and leave bushels of oversized zucchini on your back seat.”

Iowa’s expression of garden dining is realized in its cider houses. Two, Wilson’s Orchard in Iowa City and Fishback & Stephenson in Fairfield, have extraordinary kitchens, too. F&S raises its own cattle for its burgers, which are made from entire cows including tenderloins and ribs.

WALLACE HOUSE

Restaurant gardening has been the essence of Wallace Centers of Iowa since their preservation as historical sites, fittingly because the Wallace family’s fame and fortune derived directly from their genius with seeds.

One part of WCI’s mission is food security. They set aside an entire acre of garden production to grow sweet potatoes and donate each year’s harvest to area food banks and food pantries.

“Sweet potatoes are nutritious, easy to prepare, store well, and a common food in many cultures,” explained Carla Hicklin, who retired last year after a decade of managing the place.

WCI hosts “Know Your Farmer Dinners” that pair a homegrown menu with a chance to personally talk with top Iowa growers. Their restaurants in Des Moines and Orient connect patrons to their garden. Seasonal menus reflect garden, land and historic properties.

All produce served is grown naturally on the Orient farm. Most is harvested within 24 hours of the dinners. Chef/gardener Katie Porter, who also retired at the end of last season, consistently presented farm-fresh platters that included Milton Creamery cheese, pickled okra, hakeuri turnips, radishes, slaw and crosnes on my last visit.

That latter food (aka Chinese artichoke) is extremely rare in the U.S., a root that looks a bit like a snail. Another night



Wallace House hosts a variety of farm-to-table dinners. Photo courtesy of the Wallace Centers of Iowa

the platter was composed of broccoli, green beans, traditional cauliflower, graffiti cauliflower, eggplant caponata, yogurt pesto, flatbread and a choice among three kinds of flavored crickets. (The dinner’s discussion topic that night was “edible insects.”) Dining at Wallace House epitomizes farmhouse elegance. Guest attire is casual, but tables are dressed up in real linen tablecloths, real flowers and homemade candles.

“Abundance Preserved Foods” are created from the fruits, vegetables and herbs grown organically at the Orient farm. Tomato compote, apple butter, whiskey apple butter, apple sage seasoning, garlic smoked salt, rosemary orange salt, basil salt, hot chile salt, hot chile sugar and lavender sugar (fabulous in beverages) are sold year around and at farmers market in warm months.

From March through mid-December, the Des Moines house hosts “Food for Thought” dinners on Thursday nights. Diners are encouraged to discuss topics that would likely have interested all the Wallace family. The bounty of the gardens can be enjoyed at the farm’s stall at Downtown Farmers Market, Wednesday teas and Thursday farm-to-table dinners in the Des Moines Wallace House in Sherman Hill, plus Tuesday lunches and Friday “Pizza on the Prairie” dinners at the Wallace farm in Orient. Those events help support the Center’s many programs, scholarships, internships and teaching programs.

OAK PARK

The most ambitious private restaurant garden is in the works at Oak Park in Des Moines. We asked Executive Chef Ian Robertson about the plans.

What are you planting for spring, for summer and for fall?

“We are planning on planting a variety of vegetables, herbs and edible flowers sourced from Seed Savers Exchange, Johnny’s

Selected Seeds, and Row 7 Seed Company. We are most excited about heirloom varieties of tomatoes, peppers, carrots and squashes that can't always be found at the grocery store."

Why do you think homegrown stuff is important to a restaurant menu?

"It comes down to nutrition and flavor. The fact that it doesn't travel hundreds of miles to the table. You know exactly when it was harvested before it goes into a dish."

Wall Street Journal wrote about heirloom grown edible corn and its superiority for masa. Do you plan to grow any?

"We are planning to grow heirloom sweet corn in conjunction with the 'Three Sisters' (corn, beans, squash) traditional growing method, as a way to utilize and celebrate classic companion planting."

What are some menu applications you have in mind for garden produce?

"I am most excited to use our garden produce to build one of my favorite dishes, a strawberry and beet salad. Along with the strawberries and beets, it would also feature radishes and dill from the garden."

Robertson mentioned Seed Savers Exchange reverently. That nonprofit organization outside Decorah is America's greatest seed revivalist and seed bank. Almost everything it sells and trades is

Best vegetables to plant

from "Grow Your Harvest"

Tomatoes	Peas
Lettuce	Kale
Carrots	Radishes
Green Beans	Beets
Peppers	Onions
Cucumbers	Potatoes
Zucchini	Broccoli
Spinach	

an heirloom, mostly brought to America from other continents and Mexico.

We asked Cleverley what the best time to start a home garden is.

"Sometimes I planted the first two weeks of March trying to get a head start. But it turned out that the seeds I planted in early March sprouted the same time as ones I planted in late March and early April." ■

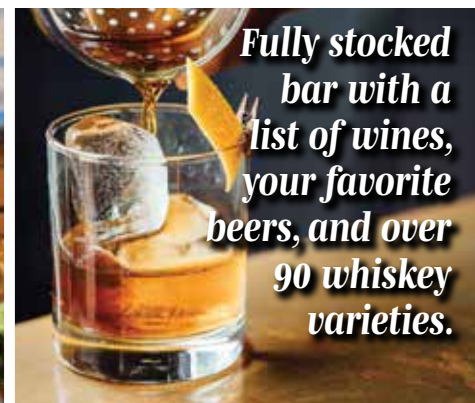
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THE RETURN OF THE *Neighborhood Joint*

Across the metro, restaurants are serving the needs of their neighbors with a generous dash of nostalgia baked in.



By Jim Duncan

On a Friday midnight visit to Nashville's century-old Prince's Hot Chicken, I asked owner Andre Prince Jeffries if she felt safe having enough money on hand to cash payroll, social security and welfare checks for her neighborhood, which was considered "dangerous" by our hotel concierge. Before Andre could answer, a chef chimed in from his station manning six frying pans: "Ain't nobody ever gonna mess with Ms. Andre, she IS the neighborhood." She has been for more than 50 years, too.

A renewed popularity of neighborhood restaurants is likely a reaction to how we ate during the deep pandemic when everything was brought to our houses in plastic boxes. Now we want to eat in comfortable places and interact with familiar people.

Photo courtesy of
Valley Junction



Tony Lemmo, George Formaro, Jim Duncan and Larry Cleverley at Noah's.

One Friday night in late January, I met three food business friends at Noah's Ark. Fortunately, we had a reservation for 5:30 p.m. because every table was taken by 5:20 p.m. Our group had met before at Noah's and usually spent three and a half hours ordering one or two things at a time. On this recent visit, we were told that our table had to be turned for another reservation by 7:30 p.m.

Clearly the COVID-19 era has passed here. Mandated distancing, requisite masking, forced shutdowns and the unbridled metastasis of Big Brother's control over our lives are being tossed on the dung heap of memories best forgotten.

Noah's has a history and tradition that draws people from long distances. It's extremely popular during high school wrestling, track and basketball championships with people who likely visit Des Moines only a couple times a year. More so, it is a neighborhood joint. All four of us that night ran into familiar faces even though only one of us grew up in Noah's hood. We also all knew the owner, the chef and several servers.

In some sense, Noah's is part of the entire Des Moines neighborhood. It exudes a geist produced by a city that is a collection of small towns. Everyone who loves the place has their own nostalgic tie-ins. After we posted a photo of our gathering there on social media, people from all over the world commented about their personal attachments to the place.

"My first dinner date was there." "I went there after my prom." "I have never found another place with such amazing yeast rolls." "My parents took me there for my first pizza." "I love, love, love this."

Noah Lacona was the face of his restaurant for more than 50 years, and his son, daughter and grandson have been there since he passed. The recipes are mostly faithful to his mama's. The word heirloom is overused in the food business, but Noah's Ark is an heirloom belonging to the family Des Moines. So are those yeast rolls.

Other traditional neighborhood gems on the near westside include Jesse's Embers where the steaks are impeccable and the aromas enticing.



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Across the metro, restaurants are similarly serving the needs of their neighbors with a generous dash of nostalgia baked in. Here are some favorites, moving, like America, from east to west.

Eastside

Bianchi's Hilltop shows many reminders of the restaurant's long history on the walls, paying tribute to past customers. Murals of rustic Italy remind one of décor in the middle of the last century. Hilltop has been family owned since it opened in 1950.

Menu items are out of the 1950s, too. Meatball sandwiches are very generous. Onion rings and pizza are quite thin. Chicken livers are pan fried in butter. A horseshoe-shaped counter, one of few left in 2020s Des Moines, encourages people to converse because everyone sitting there faces everyone else. It also makes singles feel comfortable and not really alone.

On my visits, the restaurant's main crowd arrived later than at similar westside places like Noah's, which can be quite busy by 5:30 p.m. A new friend at the counter explained that "east siders work till 5."

Daily specials, more of a small-town thing than an urban one, are popular. I have run into meat loaf here that esteemed caterer Cyd Koehn labels the best she has ever tasted.

Other eastside neighborhood restaurants of tradition include: Los Laureles, our city's first Michoacan/Jalisco style café; Norwood Inn, where it's OK to put ketchup on an Italian sausage sandwich; Kelly's Little Nipper of tenderloin and sausage sandwich fame; Eastside Eddie's with seasonal changes to the daily special menu and fabulous soups; Pho All Seasons, where the café's history was interrupted by a family move to Arizona and then revived by an all-female family return to ownership; Scornovacca's, where the limoncello mascarpone cakes will dazzle you and \$10 lunch specials include most pasta dishes and 8-inch pizza; and Gerri's, which frequently wins best wings contests.

Southside

Tumea & Sons exudes old-time values. Packed parking lots, even for lunch, attest to a bond of loyalty between the café and its customers. It also might have something to do with bargain prices that mostly stay less than \$12 for lunch.

Saltimbocca is faithful to a classic family recipe. Cavatelli are made daily, not just on Sundays. Brasholi are stuffed with bacon and celery and braised in red sauce. The iconic creamy Parmesan dressing is an original recipe. They serve cannoli and irresistible cream-filled peaches for dessert.

One regular customer is comedian Willie Farrell, who has his own booth.

"I grew up in this neighborhood. I remember when Dairy Queen was the only place to eat. Then 'Papa' Joe Cataldo

decided to make Italian sausage sandwiches and sell them in the parking lot here.

"Two restaurants tried to make it in this location and failed. Joe Tumea made it work from day one. He came to Iowa as a teenager. His wife, Lou (Lucretia), came here at 13. They worked as tailors and saved money to open this place. There is nothing like it on the southside now. It's fabulous in every way. The walls are the history museum of the southside. The bocce ball court is the best in town."

And you can always know that either Joe Sr., Louie, Mario or Joe Jr. will be at your service.

Another southside classico is Baratta's, which began as a family home and grocery market. Its amaggio is a civic heirloom, breaded in multiple crumbs and grilled, then served with roasted red peppers and mushrooms in a sauce made with fresh squeezed lemon juice, olive oil, garlic, basil and white wine. Baratta's tortellini are handmade with cheese or spinach. Crab meat and artichoke hearts are pizza toppings.

Highland Park

Chuck and Elizabeth Bisignano opened Chuck's in Highland Park in 1956. That was before Chuck's brother opened Babe's. The pizza has been made behind a storefront window ever since. The walls host historic photos and sometimes paintings from late owner Linda Bisignano's museum-quality collection. Top notch music is free every Friday and Saturday.

New (2014) owner Emily Jones has kept things the way they were while extensively remodeling and updating. The thin crust pizza are pure "tavern style," meaning slices stay parallel to the ground when lifted to eat. Some call that "Iowa style."

Chicken livers are so popular that they are on both the appetizer and entrée menus. Cavatelli are a daily special. Grinders and sausage toppings are house-made from scratch. Italian chicken is fried here; most other places broil that menu item. Daily specials are generous. So is Jones, who leads Highland Park efforts to feed needy mouths every Thanksgiving.

Other Highland Park neighborhood cafés of tradition include El Salvador del Mundo, where one praises the Lord as well as the pacayo blossoms, pupusas, yucca and plantain; and Chicago Speakeasy, where the prime rib and fried chicken excel and the heirloom salad bar is ice cooled.



Willie Farrell in his booth at Tumea & Sons

Beaverdale

Joe and Red Giudicessi opened Christopher's in 1963. The bar, one of the first after liquor by the drink became legal, carried the place while the food fare found its way to the top of the town. Joe told us once that, in the early days, the bar was three deep in standing room. "And that was the day of the two-fisted drinker."

This has always been a hospitality-first place. Joe also believed that "a bad dish is forgiven, and it can be fixed. There are no second chances after bad service."

It's still in the family with Rene and Ron now hosting and running the bar. The pan-fried chicken is so famous that its frying pans were the first thing the family saved from a fire. So are the prime rib and the manicotti Florentine.

Flying Mango is as much a lifestyle choice as it is a restaurant. Owner Mike Wedeking is the pitmaster of Polk County, the only guy I know of who smokes exclusively with hard woods. People line up well before the doors open many nights. Extraordinary national musicians play the Mango simply because of the laid-back, Margaritaville mood and Wedeking. Customers come from all over America because Mango has been a frequent subject of Food Channel's popular "Diners, Drive-ins and Dives." One can order "What Guy Had" to duplicate host Guy Fieri's TV fare.

Franklin

Simon's owner Simon Goheen is himself embedded in Des Moines restaurant traditions. He grew up eating out almost every night because his parents' business was Italian bread and their clients were the city's restaurants.

That was in the day when courtesy bread baskets were de rigeur, and Simon's holds to tradition. Often dessert is complimentary. Long lines wait for the door to open before 5 p.m. There is live jazz Wednesdays and Fridays.

Simon's is many locals' favorite steakhouse. Prices are reasonable (most all steaks include options less than \$30) and steak dinners include a vegetable of the day, a potato choice, and either a salad or soup. Lamb chops are still made here.

The artichoke dip is made with just artichokes and Parmesan, no spinach. DeBurgos are of the Talerico school, no cream.



Paula's generous Made Right



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The main attraction, though, is Goheen, the quintessential front-of-the-house guy who greets every table and thanks each guest on the way out.

Valley Junction

Paula's is a jewel that is only open for lunch. That is a lost tradition itself. Its "Made Right" sandwiches are more generous with meat than their more famous competitors.

It's also a cash-only business. You read that right. When I forget to bring cash, my credit is good. "Anyone who wants a Made Right gets a Made Right," is the policy according to one chef.

Paula's seasonal daily specials are a draw and perspire with traditions of the past: tomato soup with grilled cheese, hot beef sandwiches with mashed potatoes and gravy, beef stew, sausage Made Rights, meat loaf and chicken fried steak.

Other traditions in Valley Junction include G Mig's Fifth Street Pub, which is not as old as others in this story but its tradition includes taking over a revered VFW outpost and changing little. It's arguably Des Moines' best example of a bar and grill, partially because of its tiny kitchen. The burgers (made



Maxie's

with ground prime rib), sliders, pastrami and soups hang out way above their pay grades. Daily and lunch specials are traditions.

Also in VJ: The original Chuck Celsi's Tavern offers famous thin crust pizza, calzones and pasta. Lunch brings five pasta dishes for less than \$10, with meatballs only \$1 each. El Rey Burrito has been in the area for more than 25 years and introduced the late-night burrito fix. Maxie's opened in 1963 and still hangs its hat in mid 20th century style. Maxieburgers, onion rings and ice cream drinks like pink squirrels and brandy Alexanders are de facto proprietary icons of the restaurant. ■



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SPILLING THE BEANS



The ins and outs
of some of your
favorite local
coffee shops

By Cyote Williams

Americans adore their coffee. Special blends, lattes, cappuccinos, espressos, you name it. And don't forget the plenty of hearty, no frills, "Just give me a cup of coffee," drinkers. They buy a can of Folgers at the store, brew it at home and avoid the hub-bub of cafes and coffee stores in totality.

Coffee isn't often mentioned when it comes to being one of life's great connectors. From the college student who just downed his eighth cup during a 24-hour study binge, to the construction worker warming his hands and belly before a day of labor or the aspiring writer sitting in the corner of your local coffee shop drafting the next bestseller, they are all connected by their preferred cup of caffeine.

Excellent coffee-drinking destinations are scattered across the metro. After visiting several coffee shops to see how they make their coffee, what type of food they serve, how they decide to style their respective shops, and why they're important in their communities, a recap of a few seems appropriate.

Latte art at St. Kilda Café and Bakery.
Photo courtesy of St. Kilda

To get the scoop on what the coffee scene is like in Des Moines, one must get perspectives from a wide range of shops. Coffee Cats at 312 Fifth St., West Des Moines, is unique because cats can be adopted from there. The family- and veteran-owned La Barista Coffee at 1963 Grand Ave., West Des Moines, was the first of its kind in the city that was equipped with a drive-thru. St. Kilda Cafe & Bakery's downtown location at 300 S.W. Fifth St., Des Moines, focuses more on their food options. The Slow Down Coffee Co. in the Highland Park area (3613 Sixth Ave., Des Moines) is relatively new and promotes an atmosphere where customers go to "slow down" and enjoy conversation inside. Zanzibar's Coffee Adventure has been in business for more than 30 years in the same spot at 2723 Ingersoll Ave., Des Moines.

While they don't represent every coffee shop or cafe in the metro, they vary from new to old, from roasting in and out of house, in how they source their food options and the ambience they strive to set. These stores provide ample insight into what goes into a successful, tasty and welcoming coffee experience.

So, what makes these places great? Is it coffee? The atmosphere? The food? Being a valuable "third place?" Combining these elements into one business is a challenge, which they all seem to welcome.

THE COFFEE

The star of any coffee shop is, of course, the coffee. Iowa isn't exactly prime real estate for growing coffee beans, so where do the shops get their beans from, and how are they roasted?

Mary Jankowski from Coffee Cats in West Des Moines buys her coffee beans from Grounds for Celebration.

"They roast their own coffee beans, so I get my drip coffee and my espresso from them. I wanted to do as much locally as I could. They helped train me when I first opened the business, so I just ordered from them on a weekly basis, and I go pick it up, so I know it's fresh. They roast once a week," said Jankowski.

La Barista Coffee, also located in West Des Moines, has been in



A Latte and pastry at Slow Down Coffee Co.
Photo courtesy of Slow Down Coffee Co.



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business for 29 years. Adrian Barrantes says they buy their coffee from a couple different roasters.

“I’ve got a guy just south of Minneapolis and another one in St. Louis where I source my coffees from. They’re roasted and packaged for me, and I throw them on the shelves,” said Barrantes.

Drew Kelso from the Slow Down Coffee Co. in Highland Park buys his coffee beans roasted by Windmill Coffee Roasters, located just north in Ames.

Over on Ingersoll Avenue at Zanzibar’s Coffee Adventure, Julie McGuire says they roast their coffee beans in house.

“I have half a dozen different contacts that are engaged in the activity of actually importing and then brokering coffee, and the coffee comes from all around the world,” said McGuire.

When it comes to St. Kilda Cafe & Bakery, Whitney Hall has remained with the same provider for many years.

“Prior to moving to Des Moines, we have used Counter Culture Coffee. We have had a long-standing relationship with them for well over 15 years now, so it’s in our best interest to continue to support them,” said Hall.

THE FOOD

While coffee is the star, pastries, baked goods and other quick breakfast items are important co-stars. Items that are grab-and-go accessible and help start your day on a tasty note are an important element at each of these shops.

Several of the shops get their goodies from home bakers and local bakeries.

“I bring in pastries. I have a couple of different home bakers that make cookies or pastries, and then I also work with New World Kitchen run by Madeline Krantz,” said Jankowski.

At La Barista Coffee, Barrantes makes their breakfast burritos and cinnamon rolls from scratch.

“I wouldn’t say what I have is a large menu. But what I do have I want to make sure I’m doing it right and doing it good. Other baking, my daughters will take care of,” said Barrantes.

Their cinnamon rolls follow an old family recipe that came from Barrantes’ grandfather, who was a baker in Costa Rica. Unfortunately, they often are sold out after the morning rush, a normal occurrence according to Barrantes.

Three home bakers, LeeTy Delights, Oh High Cookies and Scenic Route Bakery, all have their treats sold at Slow Down Coffee Co. — everything from vegan and gluten-free options to oatmeal creme pies, cinnamon rolls, deluxe stuffed cookies and more. The LeeTy Delights cinnamon rolls are only featured on Sundays, which Kelso has turned into a weekly tradition.

“I wanted to create this kind of standing day tradition people can lean into if they want. From being in this neighborhood, it feels like everybody has some sort of tie to the neighborhood. Everybody



Avocado toast at St. Kilda. Photo courtesy of St. Kilda

seems to have a memory of the area, like a special event that they would commonly do. Since we were caught up with being a new face, I wanted to provide something similar,” said Kelso, who lives in the same neighborhood as his coffee shop.

For McGuire, her intention from the very beginning at Zanzibar’s Coffee Adventure was to source their baked goods locally. Being open for three decades, they’ve had to make changes over the years.

“Over those 30 years, we have had to change our vendors periodically depending on who’s in business and who’s not in business. And, fortunately, we’ve always been able to find somebody to fill the bill. It keeps things a little interesting. It’s been a really nice opportunity for us to feature and highlight other businesses in the community and give them another space to showcase their products,” said McGuire.

“St. Kilda has always been food-focused with an added coffee element, so food is definitely necessary as we’re a daytime cafe open seven days a week,” said Hall.

Their all-day breakfast menu is extensive. Customers can find a Big Aussie Breakfast, breakfast tacos, or pastries that are easy to grab and go.

THE ATMOSPHERE

Coffee drinkers would be hard pressed to find a more unique atmosphere than that of Coffee Cats. If you guessed cats as the reason, it’s probably your morning java keeping you so sharp. You don’t have to enter the cat lounge if that’s not your thing, but scheduling time to do so takes you into kitty heaven.

“They’re all from our local Animal Rescue League, so they’re all available for adoption. We’ve done 1,323 adoptions in three and a half years just from here,” said Jankowski.

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Seeing how the cats behave with customers and around others inside the lounge offers a chance to get to know their personalities before adoption.

The aesthetic of La Barista Coffee reflects Barrantes' vision to make sure people feel at home.

"I want people to feel welcome in here. I don't like a lot of the new style or fashion. To me it seems a little sterile. I want warm, inviting colors. And I'd like to think that's what I have here. I get a lot of people saying you feel like you're walking into somebody's living room, and I think that's important," said Barrantes.

The store was previously a pharmacy. After a few years of the fluorescent overhead lights, Barrantes made the change to what you see now.

Kelso met his wife, Kara, while they worked at Barnes and Noble, and that's reflected by what is seen inside the doors of their coffee shop.

"Having a little micro version of that which isn't filled with corporate red tape is fun to kind of play with and is part of my wife and I's story," said Kelso.

The influence from the bookstore is apparent, with bookshelves located throughout the store and plenty of reading material to enjoy.

After carefully working with architects, McGuire was able to put together a vision for her store.

"There were a couple of really critical pieces that were important for me in terms of what I was trying to create, and one of them was welcoming, warm and being somewhat timeless. It's not really a mimicry or copy of anything I had experienced. It was just more about what are the right choices to help create the environment that I'm looking to create," said McGuire.

Plants galore, massive bags of coffee beans and an environment that accurately reflects a "coffee adventure" are present at the Ingersoll Avenue stalwart Zanzibar's Coffee Adventure.

For St. Kilda, the aim was to create a modern and unique aesthetic.

"It also has a sense of history and character with keeping original beams, brick and many interior elements that create warmth within the space," said Hall.

BEING A "THIRD PLACE"

A "third place" is somewhere that isn't a workplace or home. This could be a bar, library, museum, barbershop or, you guessed right again, a coffee shop. Third places are ideal for building community — somewhere to go and meet new people and create connections.

When asked, the owners of each of these locations stressed how much they enjoy being a hub for their communities.

"I think anytime a coffee shop can offer that for somebody (a third place), is great. We've hosted birthday parties here. We've

had an engagement happen here. We had a couple that came in, on their wedding day prior to their wedding, just to come in and relax,” said Jankowski.

“It’s huge for me,” said Barrantes on being a dedicated part of a community. “I’ve got a group of townhomes just right up the street here. They (the residents) tell me all the time how appreciative they are to have me right here, and it’s a nice feeling. I love being part of their daily routine.”

Kelso spoke passionately about the improvements that are being made in the Highland Park area.

“I’m really into this concept of placemaking. It’s all about bringing in spaces that people can relate to and gather in, kind of under this philosophy of the third space,” said Kelso.

Kelso, who is also the president of his neighborhood association, mentioned he hopes to keep attracting businesses that share that same mindset.

“That way, we can restore all this

beautiful infrastructure that is already here in this historic neighborhood district,” said Kelso.

“It was certainly one of the No. 1 reasons that I wanted to open, to create a space for community,” said McGuire on Zanzibar’s role as a third place. “Not just for the Ingersoll neighborhood. But when there were fewer and fewer of these (coffee shops), we would really draw from an audience much beyond our neighborhood. As other neighborhoods have developed their own spaces, it’s less necessary for folks to travel across town for it.”

“I’ve heard from customers that they had their first date at St. Kilda,” said Hall. “They were proposed to after eating brunch, they had a memorable interview, some have even gotten married within our space — creating good memories for people is what it’s all about.”

Whether it be any of these coffee shops — or another you prefer to frequent — each is unique to itself and its neighborhood and



The cozy corner at Zanzibar Coffee Adventure where the interview with owner Julie McGuire took place. Photo courtesy of Zanzibar Coffee Adventure.

owners. A step inside could introduce you to a decades-old cinnamon roll recipe, a new furry addition to your family, beautiful latte art that forces you to snap a picture before you sip, a full breakfast, or a unique specialty drink that’ll bring you back the next day. ■

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Questing for the holy zip code

By Jim Duncan

Weather dominated food narratives the last semester. Mississippi River water levels were so low that barges were only able to load 90% or less of capacity. That was messing with Iowa **soybean prices** at the worst time. In late September, Brazil, the main U.S. competitor in the market, ran out of soybeans. October through December is when U.S. soy farmers make their nut, and this time, their profit was discounted because of increased shipping costs.

Florida orange growers, **Georgia peach** farmers and **California almond** growers, all coming off terrible harvests last year, are optimistic. Hurricane season left orange groves unscathed, and rain has been heavy, but not destructive, for almonds. Peach growers still worry about an April hard freeze. In Oregon, where 99% of American hazelnuts grow, things are disastrous after ice storms froze trees.

LOCAL NEWS

The dominant theme for local restaurants was questing for the holy zip code. **Fong's Pizza**, like **Zombie Burger** before them, retreated from its beachhead in Ankeny. Those two restaurants are the most popular downtown with visitors from out of town, particularly road crews for traveling Broadway shows. Yet their magic did not translate to the fastest growing suburb...

Barrel House's Quad Cities lure did not translate to Des Moines... **Beer Can Alley** closed its Court Avenue venue less than a year after opening there... **Billy Vee's** closed its Clive store after being forced out of Valley Junction after several good years... **Ben's Burgers** closed in Ankeny after **Curbin's Cuisine** took over its space there, moving out of Beaverdale... **Dough Crazy** took its cookie dough out of the Court Avenue district... The itinerant **Big Al's** left Normandy Plaza, as it did Army Post, Hubbell, Ankeny and Adel before. He still runs two food trucks... **Jenny Lee's Korean** restaurant left West Des Moines, looking for a new venue... **Triangle Tap** closed for street remodeling. There will be a new joint off MLK...

Franka gave up its East Village location citing difficult parking after snowstorms and re-opened in Clive... **Pad Thai** gave up, citing street construction disruptions... **Scratch Cupcakery**

closed after a decade in West Des Moines but still has stores in Waterloo, Coralville and Cedar Falls... **Nadia's** bakery opened on Grand Avenue in a former Jimmy John's... **Wasabi Johnston** moved to 8481 Birchwood Court. The new place is considerably bigger and better looking with the same great sushi-centric fare. **Wasabi Urbandale** is now open in the old Irina's at Hickman and Rocklyn... Trang Pham opened her "Woman- and veteran-owned" **Egg Roll Ladies** on Second Avenue... **Fuzzy's Tacos** of Fort Worth closed both their area stores... Hy-Vee gave up on **Wahlburgers** stand-alone stores in Iowa... **Zora** was executed for improper behavior while several of Steve McFadden's restaurants were doing time in limbo or without liquor licenses... **Claxon's Smokehouse & Grill** closed in Ankeny after 26 years... **Barbarian**, a once-a-week restaurant in **Kinship Brewing**, closed when the brewery went down for the count. Chef Jacob Demars is a talented guy with terrible luck. His R/I opened just before COVID-19 quarantines. His work at Sevastapol Station was obscured by the wrong zip code... **The Old Spaghetti Works**, which anchored the Court Avenue district's makeover 45 years ago, gave up on the locale. They hosted some of America's best comedians including Tom Arnold of Ottumwa... **Paesano's** closed after 41 years on the southside... **Raising Cane's** opened their third metro store at 8660 Birchwood Court in Johnston. They also announced a new store coming to S.E. 14th and Army Post Road... **Grimaldi's** opened in Ankeny's Prairie Trail with coal-fired pizza... **Basic Bird** opened in Beaverdale with Korean chicken and bahn chan... JC Cirese is opening "**Zazas**" in the former Java Joes location along Fourth Avenue downtown... David Baruthio is opening a downtown restaurant this spring in the Fleming Building. Baruthio has been operating restaurants a few miles apart in both France and Switzerland the last several years. He had several restaurants in Des Moines after Steve Logsdon brought him here to open Lucca. The best known and most successful was Baru66 where Thomas Keller dined on his only visit to Des Moines... Chinese street food company **Wow Bao** has partnered with Walmart, so expect to see it in the latter's aisles soon. ■



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