

# Restaurant Review: Bagel & I

Charlene Jones

Here in the south, the term 'comfort food' applies to a certain style of cooking. Rich in flavor, creamy, filling and made with the love of heart. By those standards, one might not put New York style bagels in the same category as southern comfort food. But Bagel & I restaurant is the exception. In fact, it is more than the exception. It is exceptional in every way.

During my recent visit to Bagel & I, I could tell this was a place that is different from the moment I walked in. Being greeted by owners Andrew and Kim Mathers of Lynchburg set the tone for exactly how my experience would follow, especially with their signature hospitality and commitment to faith, family, and friends.

Born and raised in update New York, the Mathers relocated to Lynchburg in 2013 to be near their children and grandchildren. Their story is one that is transparent and written on a sign that greets you as soon as you walk in and reads: "Our years of experience and serving in the hospitality industry in both corporate and ministry settings have made way for our dream to become a reality in owning and operating the Bagel & I. Our story is one that displays the faithfulness of God to his people: Who in his perfect plan has woven together a tapestry of mountain and valleys. Yet remains a mighty God who has generously supplied our every need in both big and small ways along our journey".

Bagel & I is such a comfortable place. From the moment I walked into the restaurant, I was greeted immediately by Kim. Her smile just lights up a room, and her enthusiasm was so warm and genuine. With the slightly sweet, yeasty aroma in the air, I could hardly wait to order. The décor is warm, inviting, and designed for the customers to dine in an atmosphere that is casual and truly relaxing.

When it came time to order, I asked Kim for suggestions. I began with a refreshing cold seltzer drink with fresh blueberries and apples – a perfect fit on such a hot, summer day. For my entrée, Kim suggested the Booker T. – an Everything Bagel stuffed with bacon, tomato, guacamole, arugula, and red pepper schmear. I also tried their second most popular lunch sandwich – The Lakewatch – an Everything Bagel with chicken salad, and arugula. Both sandwiches were so delicious and I could see why they are the most popular.

For my sides dishes, I had the Caprese Salad, which has fresh mozzarella, tomatoes, and sweet basil, seasoned with salt and olive oil. A perfect summer salad. I also received the mixed fruit dish, along with a bag of bagel chips accompanied with two of the best schmear flavors - Red Pepper/Garlic and Scallion. I just could not get enough of these spreads. I look forward to trying other flavors including plain, blueberry, honey walnut, and lox.

This was truly an enjoyable lunch. It was such a pleasure having Abby Stone as my waitress. She is one of the nicest young ladies and so friendly and helpful. I also had the pleasure to sit down with Andrew and Kim and learn about why they decided to go into the bagel business. "I never take my business and especially my family for granted," said Kim. "Bagel & I began as a dream. It was a culmination of many long table talks, scratch paper concepts, a God-given vision, a few select investors, and a well-crafted team all aimed to serve our customers."

After 38 years in the hospitality industry, the Mathers' dream

of doing their own thing had finally evolved, being able to serve the public from their heart to others' and with a passion to serve with the strength that God provides for His glory.

The idea to open a bagel restaurant came about when their youngest son, Isaac, became sick at the age of ten as a result of complications associated with Lyme Disease. At the time, they were staying in New York City where Issac was receiving treatment each week over six months. It became a regular outing for the Mathers to go out into the city and get Issac an Everything Bagel each day of his treatment. Andrew and Kim have three children – Isaac is a Christian rap/pop artist, singer, songwriter, producer, and audio engineer who uses his God-given testimony to relate with and impact people through his music. The Mathers' oldest son Spencer works for Liberty University and is also a world-class weightlifter, holding a world record as only one of the four people in the world to bench press over 1,000 pounds. Spencer prides himself on accomplishing this feat without any performance enhancements. The Mathers' oldest daughter, Alexa, has three children who she home schools while helping her family with the Bagel & I business. The Hardy location of Bagel & I is the Mathers' second location – their first location is located in Lynchburg. Alexa is responsible for helping come up with the décor of the restaurants while Andrew actually built so much of it that graces the buildings.

Andrew shared with me that all of their turkey and chicken is roasted in-house – no deli meats – allowing for everything to be fresh from the benefit of home cooking, an essence of comfort food at its finest. He said the most requested breakfast item is the Bagel/Egg/Cheese/Protein roll, which comes with a choice of bacon, sausage, or pork. Another favorite is the Egg-in-a-Hole sandwich, which consists of egg, bacon, tomato, and guacamole. Bagel & I offers a variety of bagels including Plain, Sesame Seed, Cheddar, Poppy Seed, Salt, Garlic, Onion, Egg, Pumpernickel, Whole Wheat, Whole Wheat Everything, Cinnamon Raisin, Blueberry, French Toast, Cinnamon Crunch, and Gluten-Free Plain. They also offer more than ten Breakfast Bagels, or a choice to Build your own Bagel. The 'can't miss' option is their freshly, homemade cinnamon rolls prepared and served on the weekends – they are so popular that you are better off getting their early because they don't last long. Bagel & I offers take-out and catering, and they have a bagel food truck available for events. If you desire something special that's not on the menu, simply ask and they will prepare it for you.



From left: Kim Mathers, Charlene Jones and Andrew Mathers. Credit: staff photo

Beverages include coffee, iced coffee, soda, lemonade, orange juice, sweet and unsweet tea and water. Kim was so kind to bring me a box of delicious bagels to my office for my wonderful friends, my two-year-old grandson and me to enjoy. The bagels are almost as big as my grandson! His grandmother sent me a picture of our grandson holding his bagel as he slept, then he finished it when he awoke. It was priceless.

"We have come to love this area," said Kim. "Bagel & I is a place where our guests are welcomed as if they are in our home". The words that form "Bagel & I are just words on a piece of paper. The "I" represents people – the "you" in who the Mathers' serve, in His name. Bagel & I is a place that makes me proud to stand by my creed: "I don't make dinner. I make reservations."

Bagel & I is located at Smith Mountain Lake at 40 Village Spring Drive, Suite 11, in Hardy. The Lynchburg location is at 20584 Timberlake Road. 16547 Moneta Road. Hours at both locations are Monday – Friday, 6 a.m. – 2 p.m.; Saturday and Sunday, 7 a.m. – 2 p.m. For more information, visit thebagelandi.com.

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### Bridges Out of Poverty Workshop\*

August 8 | 9AM-4PM | 816 Burks Hill Road

### PACE Open House & Ribbon Cutting

August 9 | 2PM-7PM | 1617 Oakwood Street

### Taste of Bedford: Business Expo & Community Showcase\*\*

August 17 | 10AM-7PM | 1111 Turnpike Road

### Business Roundtable\*

August 24 | 8:30AM-10AM | 816 Burks Hill Road

### Live at Five with the Lynchburg Hillcats\*

August 24 | 6:30PM | 816 Burks Hill Road

### Annual Excellence in Business Awards Gala\*\*

September 14 | 5:30PM-8PM | 4671 Forest Road

### Live at Five with Beale's

September 28 | 5PM-6PM | 510 Grove Street

### CTE Expo

October 4 | 9AM-3:15PM | 600 Edmund Street

### Leadership Bedford\*\*

October 10 (first session) | 9AM-4PM | 1633 Venture Blvd

### Candidate Forum

October 25 | 5:30PM-8PM | 1237 Lacey Putney Way

### Live at Five with Magnolia Mountain Realty

October 26 | 5-6PM | 1333 Longwood Avenue

### Christmas Market\*\*

November 4 | 10AM-3PM | 931 Ashland Avenue

### Lunch & Learn: Marketing 101\*\*

November 9 | 11:30AM-1PM | 1633 Venture Blvd

### Align Before Nine with the Bedford Area Welcome Center

December 5 | 8AM-9AM | 816 Burks Hill Road

\*RSVP

\*\*Paid Registration

You can find more information about all of our events and programming at [BedfordAreaChamber.com](http://BedfordAreaChamber.com), or you can give us a call at 540-586-9401.