

# ‘What can I *get ya?*’



Walking in to a busy diner is an exciting sensory experience. The clang of silverware and dishes banging around, orders called from front-of-house to back, and air laden with the savory perfume of the kitchen. Trays go by filled with warm toasty waffles, deliciously greasy bacon and eggs, chicken-fried steak, Reuben sandwiches, turkey melts, and thick slices of lemon meringue pie. The anticipation builds until you're seated, a server splashes coffee into a thick china cup, and asks, "What can I get ya?" ■ Charlottesville has plenty of formal restaurants, but lucky for us, the city also abounds with (too many to count!) diners that deliver a nostalgic dream of American mealtime, where the food feeds the soul and the folks feel familiar. ■ Here's a roundup of some of our favorites. Post your go-to on our Facebook page and tell us why you love it.

>>> BY MARY ESSELMAN, MAEVE HAYDEN, TAMI KEAVENY, AND SUSAN SORENSEN <<<

## DON'T SKIP DESSERT

**Doodle's Diner** | 1305 Long St. | [facebook.com/p/Doodles-Diner](https://facebook.com/p/Doodles-Diner)

Hiding in plain sight just before the Locust Avenue exit off 250 West sits the best little diner you've never noticed: Doodle's. Walk through the door, and you're in an American time capsule of clean, comfy, country ease: brightly lit booths and tables, homey decorations, and a sweetheart of a server named Kim.

Since she was 14, Melanie "Doodle" Lohr wanted to run a restaurant, she says, and for the past 10 years, she, her

mom, and her Aunt Barbara have brought that dream to life. Morning regulars devour the breakfast combos and omelets, while evening folks come for the specials: salmon cakes, catfish dinner, hamburger steak, and Wednesday-night spaghetti. Popular desserts include three-tier cakes like the Sunshine (orange with mandarin oranges, whipped cream, and diced pineapple), chocolate chess pie, and bread pudding.

Almost as big a draw as the food is Kim, beloved for making everyone feel at home. When a grandpa comes in with his young grandson, Kim asks how their sleepover went the night before, and takes their drink orders. The boy asks for a soda, and Kim says, "Well, is that okay with Grandpa?" Grandpa smiles, "I don't care, he won't be with me today," and Kim jokes back, "Oh, so a Mountain Dew then, huh?" —ME

## SOUL-FILLING STATION

**Mel's Cafe** | 719 W. Main St.  
[facebook.com/MelsSoulFoodCafe](https://facebook.com/MelsSoulFoodCafe)

Like its longtime proprietor Mel Walker, this legendary Charlottesville landmark exudes an aura of relaxed excellence.

Stop by near lunchtime, and you'll find a line out the door, giving you a chance to peruse the menu taped to the window. Will you opt for breakfast, served all day? Perhaps the George Omelette: ham, cheese, onions, green peppers, and diced tomatoes, topped with chili beans? Or is lunch calling you to the fried fish sub or that BBQ rib sandwich?

Your stomach and heart rumble in anticipation of stick-to-the-ribs ecstasy, and already you know what you've heard is true: Mel's, with its humble, home-spun name, offers food for the soul.

Community photos cover the walls inside, along with tributes to beloved friends (and to the team formerly known as the Washington Redskins). A sign above the cash register reads: "Family, where life begins, and love never ends."

Life and love never tasted as good as the fried chicken you order

once you reach the counter and ask for Mel's most popular dish. Hot, moist, and crunchy, it's made to order and worth the 15-minute wait. Creamy mac and cheese, followed by Mel's famous sweet potato pie complete the out-of-body experience.—ME



EZE AMOS

## SING WITH YOUR SUPPER

**Holly's Diner** | 1221 E. Market St. | [facebook.com/HollysDinerCville](https://facebook.com/HollysDinerCville)

Holly's is a nighttime diner, offering comfort food and friendly fun from 5pm to 2am, Tuesday through Saturday. The place is funky and cute, with an industrial-meets-farm chic, and a honky-tonk happy soul.

An older crowd comes early to claim swivel-stool seats at the long concrete bar, or to grab a spot at the hidden outdoor patio. There they throw back signature cocktails like the Belmont Sweet Tea (Southern tea with a kick), while enjoying Holly's most popular dinner dishes—homemade meatloaf, chicken poblano pot pie, Brussels sprout hash, and fried green tomatoes.

After 9pm, a younger crowd fills the tables and booths near the small stage that sparkles with live

music on Fridays and Saturdays, Thunder Music Karaoke on Tuesdays, Open Mic Night on Wednesdays, Game Night on Thursdays, and, on occasion, Goth Takeovers with DJs. Folks who work and party into the wee hours love Holly's late-night handheld options, like the catfish po'boy, Reuben sandwich, and the Hangover Burger (gently dressed with bacon, fried egg, pepper, pepper jack cheese, special hot sauce, and lettuce).

Even the olds often hang around for dinner and "a show," just to chat with beloved manager, Morgan, and to soak in the diner's welcoming vibe.—ME



Mel Walker

EZE AMOS

## STACK 'EM UP

Tip Top Restaurant | 1420 Richmond Rd. | [tiptoprestaurant.com](http://tiptoprestaurant.com)

Somehow Tip Top manages to be both a Southern and a Northeastern diner.

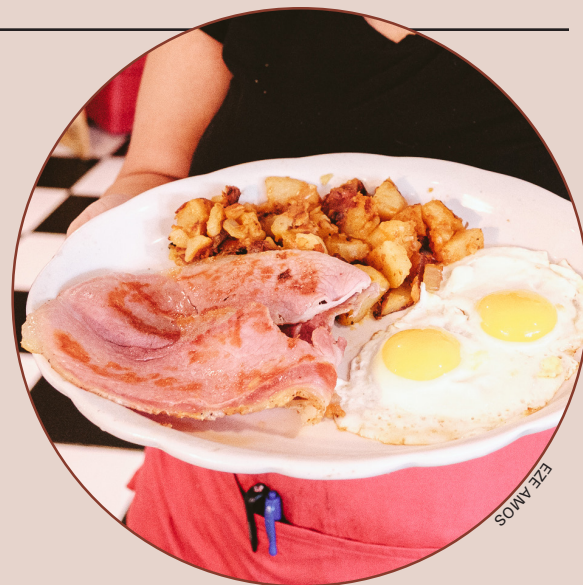
Head in for breakfast, and you'll find corn cakes ("a true Southern delight," declares the menu) and a country ham special that includes two eggs, home fries, and grits. A cheerful waitress greets you with "Good morning, honey!" and a hot mug of coffee (better than Starbucks but not as good as JBird Supply). You might try the popular buck-

wheat pancakes ("Tastes like you're in Texas"), or the two biscuits with sausage gravy and two eggs, about as Southern as you can get.

Show up for lunch or dinner, however, and you'll feel the "Seinfeld" vibe of Jerry, George, and Elaine's NYC diner, Monk's Café. Owner Terry Vassolous, originally from Greece, has crafted a menu full of Greek and Italian specialties, from grape leaves, souvlaki, and moussaka to

lasagna, manicotti, and fettuccini alfredo. The meatballs are sublime, and the pizzas stand out for their Greek-influenced toppings, like the peasant's feta cheese, fresh tomatoes, black olives, scallions, bell peppers, and pepperoni. There's even a "big salad" (one Greek, one chef).

Any time of day, Tip Top feels sparkling and friendly, a haven for weary families, workers, students, and Route 250 travelers.—ME



## TWO TAMMYS AND A SIDE OF LOVE

**The Korner Restaurant**

415 Roosevelt Brown Blvd.

[korner-restaurant.business.site](http://korner-restaurant.business.site)

Around the corner from UVA Medical Center, the Korner Restaurant has been feeding Cherry Avenue and Lee Street folks for over 50 years. "A good place to eat, where two streets meet," proclaims the menu, and that's what you find at the Korner, from 5:30am to 4pm, hefty, low-cost portions of hearty homemade food, with a side dish of neighborly love.

Philip Templeton runs the place that's been in his family since 1950, arriving at 3:30am to prepare from-scratch dishes like macaroni salad, cole slaw, potato salad, and BBQ. Once the breakfast rush starts, he's at the counter with his regulars, who show up every day.

Two Tammys and a core Korner crew keep the place humming. Tammy One greets you like your favorite aunt, bringing you heaping portions of home fries and grits, and keeping the strong coffee coming. A Korner mainstay for decades, she lights up describing customer favorites: the juicy burgers (fresh ground beef, never frozen), stuffed subs, tangy wing dings, and homemade chicken salad. Tammy Two handles the griddle, the register, and any diner thing that needs doing.

Wahoowa-proud, the Korner loves the community it serves.—ME



EZE AMOS

## A NEW MOON

**Blue Moon Diner** | 606 W. Main St. | [bluemoondiner.net](http://bluemoondiner.net)

Blue Moon Diner has evolved many times since its inception in 1979: owners Laura Galgano and Rice Hall took the reins, a lengthy closure, thanks to years of construction, COVID-19, and now a new service model. But some things never change.

Last month, the midtown diner switched to a coffee shop-style service. No more reservations, just walk in and choose your stickered booth (during the weekend brunch

madness you'll still have to put your name on a waitlist), then order through QR codes or up at the counter using a self-serve kiosk—and don't forget to drop your dirty plates in a bus bin when you're done.

Though ordering looks a little different, it's still the same heavenly Blue Moon food coming out of the kitchen—like the ever-popular Hogwaller Hash with a side of home fries, or crispy beignets topped with powdered sugar—and the restaurant is full of familiar faces running food and making drinks, including Galgano.

Blue Moon's coffee selection continues to reign supreme, with bottomless Trager Brothers Blue Moon Blend for \$3, and canned Snowing in Space nitro cold brew for \$5.

And, of course, Wednesday evenings are still for Jim Waive. The local musician brings the classic country tunes, Blue Moon shakes the cocktails and not-tails, and diners enjoy eggs all night long.—MH



**EARLY BIRD GET THE FIRST CUP OF THE DAY WHEN THE KORNER RESTAURANT OPENS AT 5:30AM.**



## BUCKS AND PUCKS

**Moose's by the Creek** | 1710 Monticello Rd. | [facebook.com/moosesthecreek](https://facebook.com/moosesthecreek)

If you're looking for the classic country diner experience—with a twist—gather your herd and head to Moose's by the Creek.

Tucked inside an unassuming building off Monticello Road, the family-owned eatery serves breakfast all day, juicy burgers, and specialty sweets for a reasonable price. Loyal patrons stop by every week to tuck into their tried-and-true favorites, like the Maine Moose (eggs, home fries, and your choice of meat and carb for \$8) or the Cville Way (French toast topped with whipped butter, eggs, home fries, and a protein for \$12). The pancakes are delightfully fluffy, the Mimosas are bottomless for only \$20, and it's one of the few restaurants in town that serves scrapple as a side.

You can't talk about Moose's without mentioning the elephant in the room, which in this case is a moose—and a bear, and a turkey, and a deer. Yep, you read that right. Moose's multiple dining rooms are tastefully decorated with busts of taxidermied animals. If that's not your thing, they do offer takeout.

In addition to housing racks of antlers (with one that patrons stand under for the ubiquitous Moose crown), the restaurant also has a hockey sports bar in one of its back rooms, complete with foosball, pool, signed memorabilia, and, come hockey season, a room full of Caps fans rooting for Ovi to score another goal.—MH

## THE OG WITH COCKTAILS

**The Nook** | 415 E. Main St., Downtown Mall  
[thenookville.com](https://thenookville.com)

Waiting in line for a table at The Nook during the weekend brunch rush is one of those quintessential Charlottesville experiences. One of C'ville's OG diners, The Nook opened in 1951, and offers an elevated diner experience with local and seasonal offerings and specialty cocktails.

A Nook brunch is best experienced at one of the coveted outdoor patio seats—just be prepared to wait in line (pro tip: Send one person to the restaurant 20 minutes before you'd like to eat to put your party's name on the list). Though the wait can sometimes be up to 30 minutes, it's not unpleasant. The hosts juggle and flip tables with ease, waiters bustle back and forth carrying steaming plates that make your stomach growl, and if you're lucky, a busker's accordion rendition of "Toxic" by Britney Spears will drift down the mall.

As you peruse the menu and begin sipping on your mug of coffee, keep these three things in mind: the breakfast potatoes, which are perfectly seasoned and served with peppers and onions, are some of the yummiest in the city, brunch pairs best with a boozy cocktail, like the Spiced Apple Mimosa, and you have to try the eggs benny at least once.—MH



TRISTAN WILLIAMS

## THE KINDNESS OF STRANGERS

**The Villa Diner** | 1250 Emmet St. N. | [thevilladiner.com](https://thevilladiner.com)

Something wonderful is going on at The Villa Diner. And it's not just the joy we felt when The Wahoo (buttermilk pancakes, eggs, and sausage) and Super Big Complete Breakfast (bacon, hash browns, biscuits, and cheese on the scrambled eggs, please) arrived at our table.

We're talking about an epidemic of paying it forward at the popular

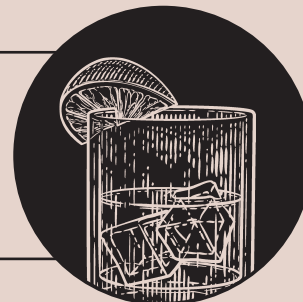
Emmet Street eatery. Just ask Mike, a local unhoused man. Or the Albemarle High School track team. Or the random person who's caught the attention of a couple of UVA football players who regularly buy a stranger breakfast.

"It happens all the time," says Jennifer Beachley, who's co-owned the Villa with her husband Ken

since 2005. One long-time customer buys everything from a veggie omelet to a Philly cheesesteak or grilled turkey melt (three of the diner's most popular items) for people she's never met, several times a month. "She says it's the best part of her week," according to Beachley, who gave the woman a map of the restaurant so she could give the cashier specific table numbers when paying her bill.

As if a Reuben and fries for under 10 bucks isn't enough, imagine your delight when, after polishing off a plate of steak and eggs, you get to the register and learn that the guy who might score the winning touchdown at Scott Stadium this weekend has picked up the tab for your meal.—SS

**HANGOVER HELPER** PLAYED HARD? EASE THE AGONY WITH THE NOOK'S TATER TOT POUTINE PILED WITH CHEESE CURDS, BACON, SAUSAGE GRAVY, AND CHIVES



TRISTAN WILLIAMS

