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# A Small Town Needs a Gold Nugget of a Diner

by RAY LINVILLE

It takes a village to raise a child, according to an old African proverb. In the central Piedmont of our state, sometimes a business helps breathe life into a small town beset by store closings and economic downturns.

Troy, a town in Montgomery County settled initially by Scottish immigrants in the early 1800s, was once thriving with textile and furniture manufacturing. Now it's prospering again as it redevelops its downtown.

Part of the town's history is that gold nuggets were found in the streets when fill dirt from the gold mines of nearby Eldorado was brought in to develop the first roads. Today a gold nugget downtown is Crawford's Diner, which was opened in mid-2018 by the husband-wife team of Jess Randall and Lydia Caroline Crawford (both go by their middle names).

The first week "started off with a bang, and it hasn't let up," Caroline says. "The Lord's been in here," she adds, reflecting on the diner's success as well as her strong faith.

"How are y'all today?" Randall greets customers as they enter. Before sitting down, the couple stops to visit with people they know at nearby tables.

Helen Dunn of nearby Biscoe and Dianne Thompson of Troy come frequently as much for the friendly staff as they do for the food.

"I just love Kelly (Brewer, the manager and primary chef). I've known her forever. Everyone here is kind and good to us," says Dunn, who has been to the diner about 10 times since it opened.

"I just love meatloaf. It's my favorite food," she adds.

Meatloaf is the special on Wednesdays. Specials vary by day and may include turkey and dressing, an open-faced roast beef sandwich, stew beef or chicken casserole.

The signature item, however, is the Sasquatch Burger. Too much for me to order, it's three huge patties and three slices of cheese, topped to your liking. Because the real Sasquatch is reportedly living nearby in Uwharrie National Forest, I'll limit my sightings to only a burger.

As my wife and I settled in for lunch, we felt like we were in a community center. People entering waved to others in the dining area and bantered with Randall. We arrived shortly after 11:30 a.m. to observe the lunch crowd as it arrived. Although a few customers ordered carryout, most came to eat inside. By about 12:30 p.m., the diner was almost full.

My wife enjoyed the chicken salad and broccoli cheddar soup – both are homemade. The meatloaf I ordered reminded me of my childhood favorite. Sides, depending on the day, may include broccoli casserole, green beans, mashed potatoes, pinto beans, black-eyed peas, potato salad, stewed squash, lima beans and turnips.

All soups are homemade as are the desserts, which may include strawberry cream pie, strawberry cake and coconut pie. An enticing dessert tower and ice cream counter tempt you as you enter. If you're feeling adventuresome, deep-fried cheesecake may be on your bucket list. A dessert favorite of my family is persimmon pudding, which was available, so we ordered it.

Randy and Pat Lankford of Robbins, about 30 minutes away, arrived for a first-time visit while we were there. Both were very pleased with their lunch.

"We were just cruising Main Street when we spotted the diner," she says.

"We wanted to go someplace different for lunch and decided to check this place out," he says.

Another first-time visitor was Nancy Capel, who came with

her sister-in-law Julianne Capel, both of Troy. Julianne had visited on the first day the diner opened and has returned several times. "It's always very good," she says thinking about the food.

Nancy, however, is thinking about the building, which was vacant for a long time before the diner opened, when she says, "This new place is awesome."

When she moved to Troy decades ago, a business named Wimpy's was serving hot dogs in the front section of the same space. "It was here for years, but women could not go in the back where there was a pool hall," she says.

As she reflected on the earlier days, Randall walked by and affirmed, "There was a time when women could not go back there," as he pointed to the rear of the diner.

The interior of the diner now shines, regardless of its checkered past. The tin ceiling and original brick walls have been painted a clean white and are joined together by a bright red molding. Charming sconces on the walls contribute to the décor including large overhead tubes for heating and air conditioning, adding an industrial feel.

The Crawfords were fortunate in timing when they bought the building for the diner. They benefited from a new community development block grant established to expand economic opportunities as part of the downtown redevelopment program of Troy. The grant paid for improvements to bring the building up to code compliance, and the building was upgraded with new electric, gas and plumbing connections as well as a new roof.

Last September, Troy celebrated the grand opening of an amphitheater in the heart of the business district. Town planners envision other improvements such as turning empty storefronts on North Main into a bookstore and a taproom. More redevelopment will continue to make this town sparkle as bright as the gold nuggets once found in its streets.

Open Tuesday through Saturday, Crawford's Diner is easy to find in Troy, although the town has two Main Streets: one running north-south; the other, east-west. The diner is on North Main three blocks north of the center of town. Call ahead (910-751-0975) if you want to know the daily selections.

**Got extra time?** Check out Caroline's Boutique and Gifts, a delightful shop next door to the diner and operated by Caroline. If you have an extra hour, also visit the creative studios of STARworks on Russell Drive in Star, only 10 minutes away on U.S. 220 Alternate. STARworks is an arts-centered community that promotes educational programs and business ventures. Its studios are shared workspaces for residents and visiting artists and also host ceramics and glass workshops. Handcrafted wares are available for sale at the School House Gallery.



Ray Linville writes about local connections to Southern food, history and culture. He can be reached at [linville910@gmail.com](mailto:linville910@gmail.com).



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