

City Cafe has been serving comfort to the Tuscaloosa and Northport communities for over 80 years.

TUSCALOOSA, Ala.-- The year is 1983, students are lined around the block in their Sunday best following the scent of cheesy, warm mac and cheese and awaiting a good ole southern meal. City Cafe's doors open and the room is bustling with students trying to get their hands on an inexpensive meal that feels like home.

Alabama graduate in the class of '87, Amanda Vaughn, recalls waiting for a good ole southern meal in Northport, Alabama, not far from campus.

"It was tradition: leaving church in our Sunday best, sweating in the hot weather waiting in line and finally getting able to go in and grab a seat," Vaughn said.

City Cafe, located on 408 Main Avenue, was opened in the 1940's. Bill Hitt returned from World War II and opened the cafe to serve working men lunch with co-owner Hoyt Brasher.

After around twenty years of Hitt's ownership, the cafe shuffled through many owners before finally finding its current owner, Joe Barger, who bought the cafe in 1974.

Barger spoke with Brasher and Hitt to continue the original southern-style menu the cafe's customers had enjoyed for years already.

City Cafe's menu includes all the homestyle cooking a southern soul would miss: biscuits and gravy, hamburger steak, fried chicken, creamed corn, fresh vegetables, fried green tomatoes and more.

For Vaughn, the mac and cheese was always a hit. "It was piping hot macaroni noodles with smooth, liquid cheese poured over," Vaughn said. In Vaughn's day, people lined the block for a bowl of that liquid gold.

Vaughn and her friends visited the cafe as often as they could for its affordable meals, but almost always attended after church on Sundays.

“You had to race to get in line and get a table before they sold out of certain dishes or worse,” Vaughn said, “closed for the day.”

City Cafe was once only open for lunch hours, closing at 2:30 p.m. every day, with its rush hour being late lunch on Sundays. Now, the cafe is open from 4 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. every day but Saturday and Sunday.

Current UA student, Sedarious King, orders the french toast at City Cafe for brunch.

“I have stopped in here a few times for a good meal,” King said, “it reminds me a lot of my mom’s home cooking.”

The cafe has a classic style, with bench seats, a few tables and a particular country charm to the old building.

“It looks like they don’t take good care of the building since they are so focused on getting you good food,” Vaughn said.

The environment is warm and inviting, like you are walking into a family home, with the smell of dinner cooking in the kitchen.

A frequent customer of the cafe, 62-year-old Eddie Harris, who enjoys people-watching over a cup of coffee, watches students come in and out of the cafe often.

Harris describes the cafe as “family-oriented” and perfect for people from all over, especially students.

“For a student needing good, hardy meals on a budget, and who may be a little homesick,” Harris said, “City Cafe is the perfect place to go to feel at home.”

Although prices may increase and more restaurants have become available, the southern charm, home cooking and familiar atmosphere of City Cafe has stayed true for over eighty years.

Still in the same location with the same southern dishes, City Cafe remains a staple dive, with customers to this day waiting in lines outside to claim a seat.

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