

Starving Artist Cafe

Written by Mark Shaffer

Tuesday, 24 June 2008 10:29

Lowcountry Weekly takes you to the Starving Artist Cafe

Editor's note: Each month Lowcountry Weekly invites you to dinner. Or lunch. Maybe even breakfast. This is not a restaurant review. The Big Idea (with apologies to Ernest Hemingway) is to provide you, dear reader, with a vicarious culinary experience, to share something of our rich and diverse food culture and the individuals who labor so hard to put it on the plate. Our "moveable feast" is a sort of loosely organized, roving dinner party seeking out the best eating experiences the Lowcountry has to offer - high end, low end and every end between. We are dedicated, we are hungry and the food is out there.

"I was at this restaurant. The sign said "Breakfast Anytime." So I ordered French Toast in the Renaissance." □ – Steven Wright



Breakfast. The most important meal of the day (according to your mother and the U.S. Department of Agriculture), and the most neglected. The majority of Americans are too busy rushing around in a semi-conscious state of panic, readying themselves to leap back into the giant pneumatic tube we call The Rat Race to bother with breakfast - real breakfast. And what do you know? An hour after we're at work the last wave of the morning's caffeine or sugar rush leaves us high, dry and twitchy as a long-tailed cat in a room full of rocking chairs. Listen to your mother. Eat a good breakfast. We know a place...

The Lowdown

Location: Adjacent to the Inn at Town Center, 2001 Boundary St.

Atmosphere: "Relaxed, open, friendly."

Motto: "Welcome home."

Cuisine: New England-style diner/deli food.

Alcohol: Not yet

Serving: Breakfast and lunch. Breakfast served all day. Dinner's in the works.

Etcetera: Lunch is available for delivery. Free wi-fi.



The story behind the Starving Artist Café is one we've heard before but with a different angle.

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Pat and Patti Aveni (husband and wife, respectively) vacation in Hilton Head and fall in love with the Lowcountry. Eleven years and a couple of businesses later, they're still here. Pat got into the plumbing business along with his son-in-law, Doug Pine. Patti eventually opened the Village Art Emporium in Port Royal, which she says "is the reason we have the Starving Artist today, 'cause I starved down there for a year and three months."

"My dad had a diner back in Connecticut when I was just a kid," says Donna Pine. "He talked about doing another diner and my mom wanted to open an art gallery closer to town. They ended up compromising and this is it." The Starving Artist Café is proof that compromise can indeed be a good thing, even a tasty thing. The space next door to the new Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center just happened to fit the concept: a working restaurant wrapped up in a fully functional art gallery without a wisp of pretense on the menu or hanging on the walls. Or as Donna puts it, "it's relaxed, open, friendly with a homey feeling where people feel free to look at the art work and chat with the people around them."

That "homey" feel runs from the cash register to the kitchen. "We've got no problem with nepotism here," laughs Donna. Starving Artist is one big family affair with Donna and Patti running the floor and gallery while Pat and Doug stick mostly to the kitchen. The Aveni grandkids help out, as well, and Executive Chef, Anthony Linnen's wife, Sheila, is the café's expert resident baker. Did we mention the Starving Artist offers a full service bakery?

We claim a table near a section featuring Pearce Hammond's vivid scenes of Sea Island Gullah Culture. One piece demands attention: a tall, elegant woman in a crimson sun hat and bright yellow dress holds a picnic basket. A matching red and yellow scarf tied around her neck billows in the sea breeze. A little girl peeks shyly from behind her skirt. In the tradition of Gullah painting, both are faceless. I'm still entranced when samples of homemade muffins hit the table.

On Tape:

Lots of "mmmmmm" sounds.

It's like cake.

Yeah! That's real cream cheese frosting.

And lots and lots of butter.

That (frosting) is ridiculously rich.

Chocolate is good.

Ooh, la la from the griddle

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