



By Doug White



Ain't She Sweet! Bryant's Sweet Tea is a Real Treasure



Photos by Bret Curry

In the movie, "Steel Magnolias," Dolly Parton's character, Truvy Jones, declares "sweet tea is the house wine of the South."

Here in Arkansas, we tend to take this Southern tradition of making and drinking sweet tea for granted. It is an essential offering at any true Arkansas eating establishment and has, in fact, been offered at each and every one of our "Let's Eat" tour stops. So when you patron a restaurant named "Sweet Tea Café," it better make a dang good sweet tea. And the place ought to make a mean platter of fried chicken.

Sweet Tea Café passes both tests with flying colors.

"The secret to good sweet tea is you boil the water, but you don't boil the tea," says owner Cindy Outlaw, who along with her husband, Billy, is the proud owner of Sweet Tea Café in Bryant. We dared not ask Cindy the secret to her fried chicken, but, in retrospect, we should have – it was that good.

Sweet Tea Café opened in 2011 in The Bryant Commons Shopping Center just off Arkansas 5 in Bryant. "Our dream has long been to open a restaurant, and here we are living our dream," Cindy said, beaming.

Open for lunch and dinner, Sweet Tea's menu offers something for everyone. There are fresh salads, heaped to the brim with veggies and chicken (fried or grilled). There is an entire section on the menu devoted to "Lena Bell's Sassy Sides" including pinto or white beans, green beans, turnip greens, macaroni and cheese, corn, fried okra, side salad and my personal favorite, smashed red skin potatoes with gravy. The "sides" are named in honor of Cindy's grandmother, Lena Bell, who taught her how to cook.



For entrees, the restaurant offers its interpretation of true Southern specialties. When you ask most of the regulars for their recommendation for a newcomer, without hesitation they will say "try the fried chicken – you'll love it."

Try it we did. Our fried chicken tender lunch meal was still steaming when delivered to our table, and within one bite the recommendation was validated. The crispy crust was tasty but not overpowering. The result was a perfect balance of crust, spices and fresh chicken.

In addition to the regular menu offerings, Sweet Tea has daily entrée specials. They include:

Sunday and Monday: Cindy's Buttermilk Fried Chicken; crispy fried chicken livers and gravy; JoAnn's Perfect Pork Roast; Amber's Double-Dipped Chicken-Fried Steak; and Mamaw's Meatloaf.

Tuesday and Friday: U.S. farm-raised catfish (three- to five-piece options); eight- or 12-piece jumbo shrimp; fish and shrimp combo; three-piece chicken tenders; seafood gumbo; and red beans and rice are also available. The fish and shrimp combo comes

with coleslaw, french fries and hushpuppies. The gumbo and beans are complimented with hush puppies. A variety of special side dishes are available on Tuesdays and Fridays, including fried dill pickles. The café offers one free child's chicken tenders or corn dog meal for each adult meal purchased on Tuesdays and Fridays.

Wednesday: Cindy's Buttermilk Fried Chicken; crispy fried chicken livers and gravy; baked chicken and rice; and Perfect Pork Chops.

Thursday: Cindy's Buttermilk Fried Chicken; crispy fried chicken livers and gravy; Amber's Double-Dipped Chicken-Fried Steak; and Mamaw's Meatloaf.

On two visits to Sweet Tea, two daily specials reigned supreme. The first was the smothered steak and gravy over white rice. The thick gravy complemented the tender steak and made for a delectable meal. The second was the Sweet Tea version of an old favorite, meatloaf. Again, cooked to perfection with a nice, sweet tomato sauce topping on a thick and tender slice of meatloaf.

The question begs, "Does Sweet Tea have desserts?" To which we reply (in our best Dolly Parton accent), "Why goodness gracious, sugar button, of course they do!" Among them were chocolate pie, apple pie, coconut pie, peanut butter pie, cheesecake, hot fudge brownie sundae and blackberry cobbler with ice cream.

All the desserts were made fresh by the Sweet Tea team, and the portions were massive. Our party enjoyed each and every one, but if you forced us to choose just two, it would have to be the peanut butter pie and the blackberry cobbler.





"We are so blessed to have so many family and friends that believe in our dream," said Cindy. "It's what makes coming to work every day so worthwhile; that and giving our customers good food at good prices. My sister, Tracy Bright, and brother, Jay Lewis, and his wife, Patsy, volunteer to keep things running smoothly. Without them and my mom and dad, our dream would have not been possible."

Sweet Tea has found the formula for success. Mix equal parts hearty food, served fresh with Southern hospitality and excellent service, stir. And enjoy this time-tested formula with a tall glass of iced sweet tea. Now you're talking! •



The quaint, tidy restaurant has a friendly and attentive staff, many of whom are family or friends of family. These folks make your visit even that much better as the service is fantastic. Back in the kitchen, the Outlaw family members abound. Cindy handles the register while Amber Upton, Cindy's daughter, prepares the food with the love and care that only a mother can pass along to her daughter. The rest of the crew handles everything from preparing the tasty food to prepping the orders to delivering the heaping plates of comfort food to the tables. The rest of the team includes: Keith Johnson, Adam Blair, Kim Moore, K.W. Roy, Haley Ward, Jesse Marcrum, LaDean Hostetler and Jeremy Carter.

Sweet Tea Café

612 Office Park Drive, Suite 3
Bryant, AR 72022
501-213-0268

Sunday and Monday: 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.
Tuesday through Friday: 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.
and 5 to 8 p.m.

Closed Saturdays

Sweet Tea Café also offers catering services.

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