



Food Trucks

By Bryce Parks

At this point, food trucks are not a new thing anymore, even hidden away here in Dubuque. But they do tend to come and go, with new faces popping up and veteran trucks parking their rides, and quite a few riding the wave year after year. Some locals have made them a regular part of their balanced diet (or unbalanced, as the case may be) while some of you, for some reason, have not yet partaken. Over the last couple of years, the tried-and-true food truck warriors have found fairly regular patterns, developing repeat customers while offering great variety to parts of town that otherwise might mean packing a lunch to work everyday. So, we thought we'd do you all the great service and put together a rundown of the current players in the Dubuque and immediate Tri-State food truck scene. Now, before you send letters (do people still send letters?) saying we forgot this or that, know that we're focusing on those vittle vendors who are indeed on wheels (truck or trailer), local, and regularly serving the general public. If places only cater or set up tents to serve from or roll into town once every few months,

they might be delish and all, but they're not "our" food trucks. This is a highlight of our homegrown talent, capisce?

For the rundown of the local talent, check the list of 20-plus local players in the game. What we're going to look at here in this piece is why they do it. What is the draw of the food truck versus the brick-and-mortar restaurant, and how did chasing the latest "fad" in food work out for some of Dubuque's best-known mobile eateries?

The draw of the open road with no rent or anchors to a single spot is clearly an attractive drawing point for those considering starting up a mobile "restaurant." And I'll bet not having to clean the bathrooms ranks pretty high on that list, as well. But the truth is, the list of cons can often be as long as the list of pros for getting into the business. So, let's take a look at both.

While the list is long, there are four basic reasons most truck owners will give you if you ask them why they do it. The first is, of course, that it allows you to be your own boss. Food truck vendors are owners, chefs, and staff all in one. You decide where to park, what to cook, and what your hours will be. While it involves relying on yourself, you also don't have to take orders from anyone (except food orders), which can feel pretty liberating.

Secondly, you can design your own menu. This is where you chase your food passions, get creative, share family recipes, innovate, or fill a niche in our market. You

can also change the menu whenever you want if it's not working or you want to tailor to particular events or audiences.

Third, investing in a restaurant can come with a lot of risk. You sign a lease, you invest in renovations, you hire staff, all with the potential risk of it failing. A food truck is a low-cost investment, and you are less tied to any one decision. I'm not saying a food truck is cheap, but it can be a lot cheaper than a building and, well, you can also always sell it, often much easier than a restaurant.

And finally, location, location, location. Not being tied to any one location or strategy is huge. This type of pursuit allows you to change it up, seeking whatever is the most profitable and enjoyable combination of location and menu. You won't burn out patrons in the neighborhood of your restaurant, and you can develop a devoted following in multiple locations who look forward to your flavors when they don't get the chance to have them every day or every week.

So, now let's look at the downsides, the sides people who aren't in the thick of it don't often see. The top four downsides on most lists clearly don't live in the northern Midwest, so we're replacing a popular No. 4 with our own obvious addition we'll save for last.

Working in tight spaces can be a drag. You might work in a space as small as 8-by-12 feet and share that room with your storage, cooking surfaces, and even other employees. The limited space can

also make it difficult to stay stocked on ingredients. And it usually means having a licensed prep space outside of the truck.

You also have to abide by zoning laws, local ordinances, and have all the proper permits. This often involves getting permits to park in a specific recurring spot months in advance or working out deals with other businesses to make things like electricity or bathrooms accessible to your customers. You may even have to remember to plug the meter.

While trucks can cost up to \$100,000 to start new, many proprietors start with used trucks to afford the game, which means it also needs maintenance, like any vehicle. While you won't have to pay traditional rent for a brick-and-mortar property, truck owners need to be prepared to pay for routine maintenance and the occasional repair. And you know, gas. I've never seen a fuel-efficient food truck.

They say it can be tricky to maintain customer loyalty when your truck moves around. I think this is less of an issue in Dubuque than major metros. In fact, I would argue that a well-planned rotating schedule here would be highly beneficial in establishing a fan base. Score one for not being too big of a city to be known.

Weather in Dubuque can be a son-of-gun, both in the dead of winter and the scorching heat and humidity of summer. Surviving pounding sub-zero winds when serving food out of an open window to people standing in that wind can very often mean closing down for a few months a

year. Likewise, cooking in the metal box, no matter how many fans you have running, can border on torture on a long August afternoon. The weather might easily be the No. 1 reason to avoid a food truck.

But with all of these obstacles, almost two dozen regularly operating trucks are working to make a living or augment other income here in the Tri-States. We asked a couple of proprietors what keeps them going or what makes them want to quit. The answers were not surprising. Weather seems to be the biggest downer. No one likes putting so much work into setting up for a day only to have your patrons driven away by rain or bitter cold.

Nick Bries from The Hangry Hobo has been at it for about a year now and says there's nothing worse than having to set-up a 600-pound generator in the pouring rain and then working a full day in wet clothes. But it hasn't deterred him. After a year of the reality of 12-hour days, he's nothing but grateful and pumped for the future. You know this is a personal business when they get choked-up talking to you. He doesn't mind me saying that, as he was expressing his eternal gratitude to the Dubuque and surrounding community for the huge and consistent support that The Hangry Hobo has received since opening. It made him pause and get a little emotional. This is his livelihood. He's killing it, and it's not lost on him that it's your support that put him there. One year in, he is so happy with the choice he made to leave his old life behind and join the food truck scene.

Likewise, Adam Ploessel, who helms the Birds. Fried Chicken truck is seeing incredible success day after day, but that doesn't mean it's not work. Adam says the extensive prep and clean up have become a routine, and you just do it every day. It's part of the deal. A truck doing two gigs a day might have open public hours actually selling their products for, say, 3 to 6 hours a day, but the work day for these diehards is more like 12-plus hours a day. That's why these two trucks at least both have two crews, one to prep and serve lunch and one to run dinner and clean up. So, it's not just a guy or two in the truck all day. Some smaller trucks may run that way. For these big successful trucks, it's way more. Birds. has a crew of seven to 15 people depending on the season, and Adam admits it's very good to have Brazen or even Otto's Place in Galena, IL to look to for help if they're in a bind.

Both of these trucks are open all winter, even if they do take a few days off here or there, most likely in the dead of January. Birds. has a delicious but simpler setup focusing on the amazing chicken. Nick Bries' The Hangry Hobo can have 13 sandwiches on his menu, though a number of them are variations on a

theme, so it's not really 13 unique sammies. Maybe half that. How many ways can you make a chicken sandwich delicious? These two trucks sure know a few ways.

Nick also has a traditional gyro spit turning in the truck all the time, a great bonus in the winter, but not a lot of fun with that mega heat source running in the truck in August. But people love his gyros, and I'm one of them. His top sellers are the ribeye melt, the gyro, and the smash burger, which is funny because I love the deep fried tacos, so if that's not even in the top three, I guess that means things are going pretty well for him.

In either case, the greatest satisfaction in running the trucks is the feedback they get. A lot of that shows in the sales, but the customer comments can make a long hard day a very satisfying day, and luckily that happens a lot.

For many of the trucks, the idea grew out of expanding their existing brick-and-mortar business into another outlet, while others have started as a truck and moved to having both, and others have abandoned the truck for the building. Dubuque's first real food truck, Beauty and the Beef (2013-2016) eventually gave up the wheels, transitioning to a to-go window in the Roshek Building as American Bombshell before settling in and operating very well as Knockout Melts at the intersection of JFK and Pennsylvania. Versus food truck started as a truck and now also operates a sit-down restaurant on the north end, while Howling BBQ started as a truck, moved to a sit-down restaurant on University Ave., and sadly, no longer exists in either format as far as we know. So, it can go a number of ways.

As you'll read in the truck rundown, Jaime Salazar at Adobo's (Dubuque's second food truck, we think?) is running the truck and now also two successful brick-and-mortar venues. But you'll often still find him at the helm of the truck. And the burritos he whips out of that truck have made a name for him and a great living for his family and staff. El Burro Bandido is a 27-foot-long food truck built by Chameleon Concessions in Minneapolis, MN for Jaime and his wife Flor. It is a full kitchen on wheels complete with stove, flat top grill, steam tables, refrigerator, three prep sinks, a handwashing sink, and a food preparation table. This ain't your grandpa's camper, for sure.

This is serious business for some seriously talented chefs and business entrepreneurs. And some serious good eats for us! So, next time you see one of these culinary road warriors out plying their craft, keep in mind just how hard they are working to bring their flavors to a place that's nice and convenient for you. And if you see one you haven't tried yet, give them a shot. And hey, tell them 365ink sent ya! ■

JUNE 14TH

Catfish Murphy
with Gypsy

JULY 6TH

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The High bank boys
with Angela Meyer

AUGUST 2ND

Flatbed Four
with Mark Zalaznik

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8149 Stage Rd, Lancaster, WI | vespermanfarms.com

23 Dubuque and Tri-State Food Trucks

BY BRYCE PARKS AND
DANNY FAIRCHILD

There are a few other trucks you might see on occasion, either rolling through town every few months or only serving booked private events. And they're pretty much all good. We're not knocking them. We love them too, but we have to draw the line somewhere. This summer, OS On the Go is focusing on booked catering gigs only, but we hope you see them at a festival here or there (such as Asbury Music in the Park) as we love the Asian shrimp and burnt end tacos that Michelle was serving up last summer. Off the Hook Fish and Chips Food Truck often generates huge lines when it visits Dubuque at the Theisen's parking lot on rare occasions. They were



just in town the last week of May and will make a round in the Midwest before making it back to town. We have seen the Hurts Donut Ambulance from Cedar Falls, IA in Dubuque on occasion, most recently last month at Deery Brothers Nissan. You may want to give them a follow on Facebook. And who knows who just might roll into town next? ■



Birds. Fried Chicken

BIRDSCHICKEN.COM

Facebook: @birds.friedchicken
Birds was almost a north end restaurant before proprietor Kevin Scharpf from the celebrated Brazen Open Kitchen decided to go the food truck route instead, and what a great decision that turned out to be. Along with his No. 1 Birds man Adam Ploessel who has run the daily operations on the truck since it began, they have established Birds. Fried Chicken as one of the most popular and sought-out food trucks in Dubuque. It's also convenient that it just happens to be completely delicious. Birds. focuses on one thing and does it perfectly: boneless fried chicken. The mainstay is the O.G. Sandwich, a "basic" fried sandwich with pickles and honey on it that is far from basic. They also serve a Carolina BBQ and Spicy Bird version of the sammy. The pickles and sauces are so good they sell them jarred and bottled to take home. You can also get the glorious chicken as perfect chicken tenders or pretend they're healthy on a salad. And

the generous portion of petal-style fries that come with them is a stellar compliment. Sandwiches run \$12 to \$15 and are worth every penny. Birds. keeps a very active schedule year round and often serves two locations in a day, one for lunch and one for dinner.



Bob & Lou's

BOBANDLOUS.COM

Facebook: @bobandlous
Don't get them wrong, they serve up some of the tastiest coffee around, but what truly fills their cup is bringing our community together and empowering women to chase their business dreams according to proprietor Sarah Knabel. The name is a nod to her grandparents, and they have not only a storefront on University Ave. in Dubuque but the very busy coffee camper (and an espresso cart). So, even before you take a tasty sip, you know the positive vibe and goals you are supporting with every purchase. The menu isn't complex, just satisfying! Get this... they serve coffee!

Great coffee! But there's more. You can get that as drip or pour, as an americano, latte, mocha, and a cold brew. But they also serve matcha and chai as well specialty drinks with flavors from salted caramel, Snickers, and maple brown sugar to sugar cookie and raspberry white, and so many more. No worries, they have oat and almond milk for special dietary concerns. They also feature a variety of lemonades with fun flavors like lavender mint, mango strawberry, and spicy jalapeño and a couple of varieties of refreshers (caffeinated fruit drinks). Oh, and teas, too! We don't see anything on the menu over \$7 with most offerings more like \$5. Very reasonable. They're up and at it early when they're out in the community as you would expect, usually serving morning pick-me-ups from 7 to 9-ish at areas schools, banks, doctors' offices, businesses, and plenty of private events. You can get them to come to your place too or get a special visit from their smaller espresso cart. All the details are online, and you can follow their camper schedule via their social media outlets.



Buenie Bottoms Grill

Facebook: @BuenieBottomsoutdoorgrill

You know if it's coming out of Buenie, it's gonna be old school and classic small-town America, and this food truck hits all the buttons. What ticks the average American's taste bud checkboxes like these classics: cheeseburgers, Philly cheese steak sandwiches (with all the grilled veggie toppings), BBQ pulled pork sandwich, super nachos with taco beef and all the usual nacho supreme toppings, french fries, and, of course, fried white cheddar cheese curds. While some people go looking for the new or the odd items they've never had before, some people just want the favorites they've always loved, and this is where those come from. Follow them on Facebook to see where the Buenie Bottoms food truck will be parking next to cure your cravings. They also now have a home base store and restaurant with daily specials at 882 Main St. in Holy Cross, IA.



The Crepe Iron

Facebook: @Crepelron

The Dubuque mobile Sweet & Savory Street Crêperie is ready to serve you at the Dubuque Farmers' Market! If you're looking for a savory meal you can enjoy while you stroll, try the Basic Breakfast with ham, egg, and cheese or go for lunch with the BBQ Brisket featuring smoked brisket, cheese, mixed greens, red onion, and bbq sauce. The sweet crepe menu rotates but generally features the Classic, strawberry-banana-Nutella, blueberry lemon crumble with lemon cream cheese filling, blueberry and graham cracker crumble; and the Kid's Fave with just Nutella. The Crepe Iron also offers a gluten- and dairy-free batter option to make their tasty treats accessible to more patrons. These days, it seems that The Crepe Iron is only serving during the summer season at the Dubuque Farmers' Market. You can probably also book them for special private events. But if you want to catch them in the wild, you'll have to get up before noon on a Saturday between May and October!



Delaney's Ice Cream

Facebook: "Delaney's Ice Cream Shoppe"

From Farley IA, the old-school Delaney's Ice Cream trailers serve Chocolate Shoppe Ice Cream brand flavors out of Madison, WI to the ice cream-loving masses at special events across the Dubuqueland area all summer long. They actually have two trailers and a van to get the jobs done. They usually feature approximately 10 to 16 favorite flavors that are sure to hit you right in the taste buds. Find them on Facebook to see what family-friendly festival they'll be at next!



Dinger's D'Lite's

Facebook: "Dinger's D'Lite's"

I've said it before, and I'll say it again: Dinger is an artist. If you think freshness of taste and texture can't come out of a food trailer, well... you can be forgiven for your lack of imagination there. I can see where you'd think that. But really that just tells me Dinger hasn't knocked you out of the park yet. Even things which are NOT fresh by design like pulled pork are elevated with the freshness of the accompaniments. And her take on a noodle salad using zucchini noodles is genius. And if you want a burger, Dinger serves up some of the best around. Food trucks get cute with food and forget the common burger. Not Dinger. The grand slam hit to straight-away center, however, is the Creuben. It's Dinger's answer to the classic Reuben sandwich, but you have to look twice to recognize it as such. Because one of Dinger's departures from the classic Reuben is serving it on French bread instead of marble rye. I understand that we also eat with our eyes, and such a departure is decidedly unreubenesque. I don't care. I've said it before and I'll say it again: The Creuben is a worthy variation of the Reuben. I'm still standing on this hill daring you to try to kill me on it. Dinger isn't always out and about, but her socials keep up to date on the whens and wheres. In addition to various fests, she often performs her arts for the lunch crowd around some of the larger employers in the area.



Downtown BBQ, LLC

Facebook: @DowntownBBQPlatteville

Sorry, writer's bias, but this is Bryce writing this one, and I'm not afraid to say, as great as some of the BBQ in the Tri-States is, that Downtown BBQ is my favorite BBQ place in the area either on wheels or not. What can I say, it's simply amazing. The brisket is just

stellar, smoky but moist and tender. It's so hard to consistently make awesome brisket, and they nailed it. And not by chopping it up. It's sliced juicy. It might be voodoo. The price you pay as Dubuquers is that they rarely leave Platteville, and I don't think I've had their food in DBQ since I hired them for an event. But it's sooo worth the drive. Their usual day offering includes (assume the word smoked appears before every meat we list): brisket, pulled pork, chicken, brats, Texas sausage, baby back ribs, and jerk chicken. And many offerings contain a mix and match of these ingredients. You can "load" a brat with pulled pork or brisket or load mac and cheese with the same. Same goes for a plate of beer cheese nachos. Can I suggest taking a big order and sending the low

man (or woman) on the totem pole to make the drive to P-ville late morning to bring back some love for the office by noon? You'll find them in Platteville City Park quite often, but check their Facebook for the schedule at the top of the week and thank me later.



El Burro Bandido

ADOBOSMEXICANGRILL.COM

Facebook: @Adobosmexicangrill

When Jamie Salazar revisioned his downtown Adobo's Mexican Restaurant from a sit down place to a build-your-meal-at-the-counter service and at almost the same time launched one of Dubuque's first consistently active food trucks, business boomed and stayed there. He has since expanded the brick-and-mortar to a copy of the Dubuque location in Galena, IL. But this is about the truck or as they call it, El Burro Bandido! The food is always made fresh from scratch and served three simple ways: as a burrito, taco salad, or nachos for \$9 to \$10. Choose steak, chicken, ground beef, or vegetarian, and add favorite toppings like black or pinto beans, Spanish rice, pico, cheese, sour cream, jalapeños, hot or mild sauce, and more. And for a bit extra, add fresh guac or extra meat or queso. They are also quite famous for their Saturday morning breakfast burritos at the Dubuque Farmers' Market where the line is always long and they basically sell out every time. During Market season, you can only get the breakfast items on the truck at Market, but they move things indoors on the season. It's always fast and delicious, and they sure get around. You'll find Adobo's out pretty much six days a week, usually with one stop per day and with a number of private events sprinkled in there. They do a good job of updating their stops for the week at the start of each week. Maybe your private event could be next!



Elle & Beck's

Facebook: @elleandbecksgelatocart

Elle & Beck's is one of four active coffee-based trucks in the Tri-State area,

and that shows you just how big the demand is that they can all find room to thrive. But it helps that they make a good cup of coffee too, doesn't it? And hey, if they bring along gelato, bonus! Yep, Elle & Beck's coffee and gelato trailer serves up homemade gelato, specialty roasted coffee, and lemonade. The coffee comes hot or iced as lattes, americanos, and cappuccinos, as well as mocha and chai varieties, and all of those on ice too. You'll be able to get all of the expected add-on flavors and specialty milks like oat, almond, and coconut to serve a variety of diets and allergies. Twenty flavor shots from hazelnut to cheesecake, lavender or pumpkin pie, plus fruit flavors from raspberry to mango will darn near turn that coffee into a meal! They also have Lotus Plant Energy drinks available, and like we said... gelato! From a 2-oz. cup to a gallon, they have your hook-up! Check their Facebook page for all of their upcoming public gigs. You can also book them for private or corporate gigs. They are often at great local events like Millwork Night Market too.



Galena Roasters Specialty Coffee

GALENAROASTERSCOFFEESHOP.COM

Facebook: @galenaroasters

A favorite Main Street Galena coffee shop is now on wheels too, and as of this spring, they can come to Iowa. Hey, that's us! Thanks to proprietor and master roaster (the man behind the beard logo) Earl Thompson. He is always roasting up new flavor profiles and plans for Galena Roasters. Galena Roasters believes (and knows) there is a story behind every cup of coffee; from the bean it began as to the conversation shared between friends enjoying the final product. Clearly, this is about more than just selling a cup of coffee to this crew. This is a passion. And it makes a difference when a knowledgeable, passionate coffee superfreak is roasting his own beans—fresh. You WILL taste the difference. The menu at the truck includes the following coffee drinks: americano, brewed, caramel macchiato, cold brew, espresso,

latte, and mocha. Non-coffee drinks feature Booster Juice, chai, iced tea, and lemonade. Almond and oak milk are available. With a busy Dubuque schedule, it's clear that locals agree: This is the magic elixir. From Steve's Ace to Clarke University to Duluth Trading Company and parts in between, you'll best find their next stops posted to the coffee trailer page of their website.



The Hangry Hobo

THE-HANGRY-HOBO.SQUARE.SITE

Facebook: "The Hangry Hobo, LLC"

Owner Nick Bries hit the food truck scene with his all-new, custom-made, giant green trailer just last year, and they have been hard at it ever since, serving up a diverse menu with extremely generous portions all over the Tri-States with simply massive success. They have all the tools, and they have not hesitated to put them to work twice a day, 5 to 6 days a week. It didn't take long to get things narrowed down to a sure-fire menu that keeps locals coming back again and again. With an impressive 13 sandwiches (okay, not THAT narrowed down) to serve up, Bries says that the top sellers are consistently the amazing ribeye melt, the gyros (which are cooked the right way, on a turning spit on the truck), and the smash burgers. But I have a soft spot for the deep fried taco on a big crisp pita shell. You might try one the number of chicken-centered sandwiches, turkey melt, or patty melt. The waffle fries are also fantastic, and you might get them gyro style. And we recently saw a post about how many thousands of Hobo Poppers the crew has made since opening. They work hard making great food in large portions for a good price. No wonder they're still loving life after a year in. Nick is fired-up! Go see why!



Happi Hibachi

PETESTHAIKITCHEN.COM

Facebook: @ HappiHibachiDbq

Want teppanyaki or hibachi-style deliciousness without the formality of a Japanese restaurant reservation? Of course you do. Those perfectly seared morsels of meat and seafood? Hell, even the vegies? And perfectly prepared fried rice? And don't forget the yum-yum sauce. With Happi Hibachi, you can get all that and more without the awkwardness of sharing a table with strangers. Enjoy that wonderful mix of flavors at your desk or in front of your TV at home. They've been doing it for years now and are still going strong! Oh, how fondly I remember the day Happi Hibachi came into our lives. It changed our lives and the food truck landscape of the Tri-States for the better. The years have worn off some of the novelty of seeing Happi Hibachi around town, but judging by the smile I always have on my face when I see them, the "Happi" is still going strong. So strong that whenever I see them, I still have to make a decision to ditch my lunch or dinner plans and pull in. I love it because it's the perfect way to get steak for lunch. Even though it's cut up into morsels, the beef is always cooked to my liking. When I see them in the wild, it's usually in the Dubuque PetSmart parking lot. They are owned by the same good folks at Pete's Thai Kitchen, however, so you can get Happi Hibachi during PTK's hours, and even delivered as late as midnight Wednesday through Saturday. Catering is also available.



Hibachi Time

Facebook: "Hibachi Time"

You know, if you asked me what kind of cuisine translates worst to a food truck

format, I PROBABLY would have said Japanese steakhouse. Food trucks are opaque. If the chef is doing all kinds of sweet flips and tricks with his tools of the trade, I can't see it in a food truck. And if they're going to toss a bit of food for me to catch in my mouth, they'd have to get it through the service window first. Not only would I have thought that I would miss the fun of a Japanese steakhouse, I had my doubts that a food truck could deliver the quality of food one expects at a Japanese steakhouse. So imagine my surprise when Hibachi Time came along and not only matched the food you get in a restaurant, but arguably does it even better! And as for the missing fun? So what? Food trucks have their own kind of fun that comes with them. What I love about Hibachi Time is how customizable your order is. All the proteins you expect are represented individually or in combinations, but they also easily accommodate double meat if you've got the hankering. And they really go above and beyond with their appetizer and side order options. Where to find them? They're easy as heck to find. They reliably post a reliable schedule of where they're going to be and when. And you'll almost certainly find them at any festival around town.



Hot Diggity Dogz

Facebook: "Hot Diggity Dogz"
I'm not sure I could live around here if there wasn't a place like Hot Diggity Dogz where I could get an amazing Chicago dog. No, I'm not from Chicago. I just like the delicious things in life. A Chicago dog is one of those things that is so much greater than the sum of its parts. In fact, the individual components I could take or leave. An all-beef (Vienna) frank, poppy seed bun, sport peppers, neon green pickle relish PLUS a dill pickle spear, yellow mustard, diced onion, tomatoes, and celery salt. I mean come on. What are you supposed to do with all that? Well, if you're Hot Diggity Dogz, you show Dubuque how it's done. There are people who will say that there's no way you can get a good Chicago dog outside of Chicago. I'm not going to mince words: If you're one of those

people, I hate you. You're a fool, and I have no time for you. Stay homesick for all I care. But if you absolutely insist on being a fool, Hot Diggity Dogz has other Chicago-style favorites you can also be a fool about, including Polish sausage and Italian beef. For the smart people, Hot Diggity Dogz is Chicago-style food done right. They're family owned and operated and pride themselves on great food and great service. Respect it. You can find them at 1902 Central Ave. in Dubuque, or serving out-and-about at festivals or in parking lots like Mercy One.



Magoo's Pizza

MAGOOPIZZA.COM

Facebook: @MagoosPizza

Magoo's Pizza fills a pizza niche that was missing from Dubuque... that Dubuque didn't even know needed filling: the need for a really good almost cracker-like thin-crust pizza. And I get it. Here in Dubuque, our portion sizes are probably even bigger than the typical American portion sizes. And American portion sizes are embarrassingly large. So it's no surprise that we typically get served thick crust. No shame in that. I love it, you love it, we love it. But let's not sit here with our freezers stocked with frozen pizzas and pretend we don't like a thin crust now and again. NOT to compare Magoo's to a frozen pizza. No, no. Magoo's ingredients are garden fresh and handcrafted. And as for portion size? Well... that whole pizza you just ordered? That's YOUR pizza. You're not sharing that unless you want to. But you're probably not going to want to. And if you can't finish your whole pie, then you have pizza leftovers which are also awesome. The benefit of a thin crust is that it bakes fast. So you're getting a delicious pizza made to order with outstanding ingredients. Where to find it? You can brick-and-mortar it at their 1875 University Ave. location in Dubuque, or you can often find their truck at various festivals or already set up and ready to serve outside your favorite bar. Not feeling pizza? Their freshness of their ingredients applies to their salads, too. Don't sleep on those, either. On a more personal note, Magoo's is a pizza me and my son can agree on.



Moski's BBQ

MOSKISBBQ.ORG

Facebook: @Moskisbbq

Moski's gets it: If you are a competition barbecuer and you DON'T also operate a food truck, trailer, or other street food conveyance, you're screwing up. I mean... you're more than halfway there, aren't you? You already have the food truck, trailer, or other street food conveyance. You load it up to travel to competitions all the time. You have the passion to serve food to people who are passionate about food. And, presumably, you've got the barbecue skills to go with it. Moski's is a family enterprise with patriarch, Brice, bringing 15 years of pitmaster experience and matriarch, Shawna, bringing 21 years of nursing experience well suited to putting up with your crap. But don't give her any. Whether by volunteer or voluntold, even the kids pitch in to make this rig run. Here, you'll enjoy all your BBQ favorites done succulently, AND all the BBQ-joint classic sides and desserts right down to banana friggin' pudding. Not since coleslaw has BBQ had a better ally than banana pudding. You HAVE to keep an eye out for their burnt ends. They aren't always available because of course they're not. But when they are, get in on them. How? Well they have premises at 329 1st Ave. W. in Cascade, IA, or you can check their socials to find out where their trailer is serving. They get all around Eastern Iowa, though. So don't expect to always find the trailer near. But if they're serving burnt ends, trust me... it's worth the gas.



Myson's Tacos and Burritos

Facebook: "Myson's Tacos and Burritos"

Myson's Tacos and Burritos is seemingly founded on the immutable fact that drunk people love tacos. That's not fair. Just about everyone loves tacos, of course. But drunk people REALLY love tacos. So if you set up your taco truck near where people drink... then you get to make people happy with delicious food, and drunk people don't have to try to convince their rideshare to go through the Taco Bell drive-thru. In fact, if you're having a shindig where people will be drinking, you could do a lot worse than having Myson's come to cater it. In fact, you would have a hard time doing better. Not that they're all about the drunks, mind you. You can also regularly find them at the Dubuque Farmers' Market or the parking lots of non-alcoholic businesses. They keep their socials up-to-date with where they're going to be, so go find them. If you have some notion of what makes an "authentic" taco or burrito and won't eat it if it doesn't conform to that, then, first of all, I hate you and have no time for your foolishness. Second of all, Myson's doesn't claim to be authentic. They serve the tacos and burritos people know and love but 'cept with better ingredients. Hell, you can even get an incredible walking taco here. When I'm drunk for tacos, a walking taco is the best way for me to taco. It's a taco truck, friends. It doesn't HAVE to be anything but delicious. And that's Myson's.



Pulido's Tacos

PULIDOSTACOS.COM

Facebook: "Pulido's Tacos"

You simply CANNOT go wrong with Pulido's Tacos. Are you all about the traditional Mexican street taco? Pulido's

gotchu. Are you not above a good hard-shell complete with sour cream? Pulido's gotchu. Want to get comparatively exotic with fillings like chorizo? Pulido's gotchu. Want to keep it familiar with some nicely seasoned chicken? Pulido's gotchu. It's all so, so good. But I must lobby your appetite for an audience with one of the greatest sandwiches you're probably not eating, especially if you're as white as I am... the torta. The whole "Is a taco a sandwich?" debate is rendered totally moot in the presence of the torta. There is no questioning the sandwichhood of the torta. Tacos are served on bread, but it's flatbread, and that doesn't always align with people's definition of a sandwich. But the baguette-like rolls that tortas are served on? Anything but flat. And the torta is anything but NOT a sandwich. If you think that tacos are NOT sandwiches but like the idea of a taco sandwich... tortas are for you. If you think tacos ARE sandwiches and are curious about other Mexican sandwiches... tortas are for you. Tortas are for EVERYONE. Pulido's Tacos reliably updates their socials with where they'll be and when, mostly in Dubuque and Galena. An additional shout-out needs to be shouted out for their chips and queso. Be careful with the queso if you're transporting it home. It's served HOT so it isn't all congealed by the time you get it home.



RefreshDubuque

Facebook: "RefreshDubuque"

Just as we go to press, a little bird told me that Refresh cafe in downtown is rolling out their new food trailer version soon. We don't have many details, but the word is they will be serving fresh-squeezed juices, boba teas, and light breakfast and lunch options. We look forward to trying it and can't wait for another great option on the road!



Rockin' 5K BBQ

Facebook: @Rocking5KBBQ

Rockin' 5K just recently updated their menu, so make sure you check their socials to see what delights await you. And rest assured... delights await you. Yes, their brisket is there. And their pulled pork. Of course the pulled pork is there. Where do you think you live, anyway? What I love about Rockin' 5K BBQ is that they give me all my favorite barbecue trends in truck format so I can easily bring it home. The wonderful but comparatively new combination of barbecued meat over mac and cheese? It's on the menu. In fact, most recent barbecue trends revolve around putting pulled pork or some other form of meat candy over or under something that is already tasty in order to make both things better. In addition to mac and cheese, Rockin' 5K brings barbecue to nachos, baked potatoes, french fries, and even a barbecue walking taco (called walking barbecue). Hell, even just your choice of barbecued meat over coleslaw, barbecues most trusted ally. Rockin' 5K even has your burger lust covered, and yes... there's even a burger topped with smoked brisket. Hell yeah. The little quirk I love about this place I don't get anywhere else? A jumbo pickle as a side. I love me a good pickle. Where to find such delights? Just follow their socials to find out where they're set up. They hail from Winthrop, IA and get around to different fests and parking lots around Eastern Iowa. You'll likely find them in Dubuque at Food Festival Fridays in Washington Park.



That 1 Place (bean)

Facebook: @That1placebean

Do one thing simply, do it well, and that's all you need. As the most straightforward espresso-based coffee trailer in the area, That 1 Place is keeping to a busy in-demand schedule with a simple assortment of coffee varieties made from their own Highway blend coffee they swear is perfect for every coffee lover out there whether you like it hot or iced. Coffee, classic lattes, mocha, americano, caramel macchiato, chai latte, and flavor shots available for all of them. Plus Earl Grey or Berry Burst tea, chillers (blended drink) that comes as Cookie Monster or Vanilla Dream, and refreshers which are caffeine-infused drinks that are not coffee based. Dairy alternatives are available. If it ain't broke, don't fix it. Check their Facebook page for upcoming stops to get your morning fix!



Versus

Facebook: @VersusDBQ

Versus' slogan, "Our flavors versus your taste buds" may sound adversarial. Maybe even a threat. It isn't. It's confidence. Confidence that even if you think you don't like some of the cuisine Asia has to offer, well... you're about to change your mouth's mind. I love their bánh mì, which is a sandwich consisting of a baguette filled with all the best flavors of Vietnam. Colonization is not a good thing and is the source of A LOT of problems in the world to this very day. But French influence on Vietnamese cuisine is not one of those things. And a bánh mì sandwich is the perfect example of that. So no, Versus is not going to meet your taste buds in the parking lot by the bike racks after school or

something. But you can often find them in other parking lots like the Dubuque Farmers' Market, Darkbird Taphouse, or either Medical Associates campus. Or, if you're in a mood for some sit-down hospitality, check out Versus 2.0. It's their brick-and-mortar location at 2364 Washington St. in Dubuque. There, you'll find even more flavors worth a faceoff. The Versus food truck does an excellent job of listing every week on social media where they're going to be, so you can track them down super easy. Or maybe they'll track YOU down. Cuz it's their flavors versus your taste buds. They don't want to kick your taste buds' ass. They just want to have a little talk.



Vesperman Farms Ice Cream

VESPERMANFARMS.COM

Facebook: @VespermanFarms

As Kyle Vesperman grew Vesperman Farms pumpkin patch and corn maze into so much more in Lancaster, WI, one of the big new ventures was into ice cream. Kyle even went to a special school to learn to make great ice cream. And with the new skill, he not only introduced the product to his throngs of visitors to the farm, he also got the ice cream into local stores and launched not one but two ice cream trucks to cover the many tasty treat needs of ice cream lovers all across the Tri-States and further into Wisconsin. But Dubuque is certainly on that list, and you will find Vesperman Farms ice cream at numerous Dubuque special events as well as special stops from area business parking lots to retirement homes. Their locally created flavors include classic vanilla, chocolate, and strawberry as well as favorites like butter pecan, cookies & cream, cookie dough, and fudge brownie as well as mint chip, maple nut, and coconut. We've even tried amazing seasonal flavors like apple cider donut ice cream. Yeah, that's as great as it sounds. Follow them on social media to see the next time they make their way across the river! ■

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