

the Calico Bean market

Story and Photos by Danny Fairchild

Super Bowl, Super Bowl, Super Bowl! Super Bowl!

I'm writing "Super Bowl" a bunch of times here in print because in my bill-paying life as an advertising copywriter, I'm not allowed to call the Super Bowl the Super Bowl. I have to call it the Big Game or similar. But in this case, writing "Super Bowl" falls under fair use because it's commentary. I CAN'T send you an invite to a "Super Bowl Party" where I charge cover. But I CAN write a column about how to up your chip and veggie dip game at your own Super Bowl party.

And that, my friends, is what you call a Super Bowl segue.

Now... we here in the Tri-States have a long and splendid tradition of dips,

and we friggin' BRING IT when it comes time for the Super Bowl. Crack chicken, cowboy caviar, buffalo chicken dip, bagel dip, and the dozens that aren't coming right off the top of my head right now. We're geniuses when it comes to dips.

But here's the thing: Unless a dip needs to be served hot and therefore requires a slow cooker, why spend much time on it at all? Most people are totally happy to both bake and eat a cake that comes from a boxed mix. I've never baked a cake from scratch, and I hope I never will. Why not put the flavor of your dips in the hands of the geniuses of all of us genius Tri-States dip makers and just add your own sour cream and/or cream cheese?

Folks, if you want to really up your dip game for your Super Bowl party... do NOT sleep on The Calico Bean Market.

Yes, The Calico Bean. That little shop along Bluff Street in Dubuque. Even if you've never shopped there, you've probably heard awesome things about the kinds of things they sell there. Dip mixes, salsas, soup starters, fresh-ground nut butters, BBQ rubs. That kind of thing. And that is all very accurate. You'll find all that stuff there and way more. But that doesn't prepare you for the experience.

First of all, knowing all the different herbs and spices surely wafting through



the air, can you imagine just how amazing it smells as you walk in the door? Yeah? Well, you're wrong! It smells even better than that! Your imagination sucks!

And as for the atmosphere... well... The Calico Bean Market feels like a place where you can get exactly what you need to bake the perfect sourdough or brew a tragic love potion—your typical oven-and-coven shop. I'm kidding, of course. I'm a long-time dungeon master, and I didn't see any legitimate spell components available for purchase. But you will see just a friggin' eclectic gathering of shelving units, all of them full of something delicious. Be careful setting your coffee down in the store. It could blend right in, and you'll never see it again.

Speaking of coffee, there's almost an entire WALL of different roasts and flavors you can take to brew at home. Whole bean AND ground.

And just when you think you've seen the whole store floor, it's almost like you move a jar of salsa and all of a sudden another room of deliciousness appears. Don't get me wrong: It's a small store that FEELS small because there's a lot of flavor packed in there, but you just... keep... discovering stuff. With all the possibilities at The Calico Bean, it was hard to keep my eyes on the Super Bowl party prize.

And look, I'm not saying your family dip recipe isn't awesome. I'm sure it is. I'm just saying that, in general, The Calico Bean Market is way better than you at dips. So why not get some of their mixes, add the ingredients to turn that mix into a dip (so you still feel like you're making it), and put your time and talents to something like chicken wings? And heck, since you're there, you may as well let them help you with the wings. Sauce, seasoning, or rub, they've got your wings literally covered.

Alright, let's get into the food.

They must have seen me coming. Not more than half a minute and I was introduced to the wonder of butterscotch peanut butter. Oh, my gosh. Freshly ground and delicious. But kind of airy. So often, fresh peanut butter is so heavy and greasy. Not the case with The Calico Bean. I'm sure the oil will separate eventually, but as of this writing, my butterscotch peanut butter isn't a puzzle to spread. It's almost fluffy. And for those of you who don't get the obvious implications of butterscotch peanut butter, I have just one word for you: Scotcheroo.

I picked up a jar of salsa to try out, too. That's a Super Bowl thing. Plus we're having tacos for dinner tomorrow. My friends, are you looking for a genuinely thick and chunky—and I mean CHUNKY—salsa? The Calico Bean carries Amish Wedding brand salsa. Yeah, I know how weird that sounds. The Amish people aren't known for their salsa. Not the dance, nor the sauce. But they are known for good food, great produce, and keen canning skills, so there you have it—salsa.

Oh, my. One thing you absolutely HAVE to try with ANY salsa you have... Rose Sisters' Chips tortillas. Instead of bowlable chips, these come as three nine-inch crispy tortillas, wonderfully seasoned. So you kind of break of the chip you want on your way to the salsa. It's a deliciously shareable change to your usual tortilla chips. Maybe your Super Bowl guests aren't ready for that, yet. But keep it in mind for yourself or a homecooked date night.

Alright! Now we're on to the dips!

I was recommended the cucumber dill dip. I was told I'd never tasted anything like it before. I listened but was skeptical. I mean... I'm 45 years old. How can you possibly hope to surprise me with cucumber

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and dill? That's about as basic as it gets, am I right? Right. Oh, but wait!... What's that flavor I'm getting? Is that sweetness? Like honey? Maybe? I don't know because my tongue can't catch up to it. It ducks and weaves. Nope, it's not sweetness. It's an acidity. But not like a pickle brine, even though we're dealing with cucumber and dill. Hell, friends, I don't know. It's delicious and fun and fresh tasting and a mystery. I recommend potato chips for this. Maybe give french onion the night off this year. Oh, hey! You know the perfect use for this dip? You know the jerk who insists on making the spiciest chili they can possibly without being summoned to the Hague for war crimes? Use this stuff to tone down the Capsaicin so you can actually taste it.

Warning about the key lime dip: While it doesn't really look like guacamole, it is (as you can see) green. A partygoer who sees a green dip could reasonably assume that it's at least avocado-based. Make sure this one is properly labeled, or at least put it with the sweet stuff on your Super Bowl spread. Okay, so here's my serendipitous moment with the key lime dip. I just happened to have some store-cut mango spears. I dipped animal crackers, vanilla wafers, chocolate chip cookies, and jaffa cakes in the key lime dip. And while all that was friggin' amazing, the most delicious thing I dipped in it was the healthy option: The mango spears. It didn't even matter that the mango wasn't quite ripe, yet. In fact, that helped with the dipability of the mango. I don't know why I keep forgetting that mango and lime are such a magic combo. I'm a fool, I guess. This dip wants to be turned into a key lime cheesecake with a mango curd on top, dammit!

Buffalo ranch dip. My thought was that I'd get a dip to spice things up (buffalo ranch), a dip to cool things down

(cucumber dill), and a sweet dip (key lime pie). But I underestimated the power of ranch to cool down buffalo flavor. So, while very delicious and something that will really up your buffalo chicken dip, it is not spicy. If you're looking for spicy, you'll need to add more spice.

But really, that's the great thing about almost ALL of The Calico Bean's mixes. If you WANT to doctor them to your liking, it's easy to do.

Super Bowl parties are a lot of work to put on. Make it easier and better with The Calico Bean Market. Or, if you're expected to bring something to someone else's party, The Calico Bean Market is an easy way to dazzle.

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The Calico Bean Market

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National Seed Swap Day Celebration

Saturday, Jan. 25,
 from 2:30 to 4:30 p.m.

This event is free and open to the public.



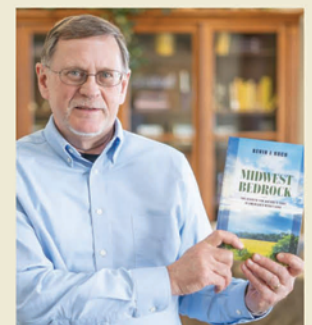
Visit with local gardening and environmental groups at this drop-in style event in the third-floor auditorium. A variety of seed packets suitable for Iowa growing will be available for free while supplies last. Attendees are also welcome to bring in their own seeds to share or swap. Seeds brought to share or swap should be well-packaged and clearly labeled.

"Midwest Bedrock" Author Event with Kevin Koch

Sunday, Jan. 26, from 1 to 2 p.m.

This event is free and open to the public.

Local author Kevin Koch will read selections from his latest book, "Midwest Bedrock: The Search for Nature's Soul in America's Heartland." Part history, part memoir, and part interview-based research, Koch invites readers to join him on a journey through the beauty of the Midwest to discover



lesser-known landscapes and stories of the past. Copies of the book will be available for purchase at the event.

Kevin J. Koch is Professor Emeritus of English at Loras College in Dubuque, Iowa. He is also the author of "Skiing at Midnight: A Nature Journal from Dubuque County, Iowa" and "The Thin Places: A Celtic Landscape from Ireland to the Driftless."

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