

4-1-2020

Iconic Eats & Newfound Treats

Ron Wagner '93

Cindy Landrum

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarexchange.furman.edu/furman-magazine>

Recommended Citation

Wagner, Ron '93 and Landrum, Cindy (2020) "Iconic Eats & Newfound Treats," *Furman Magazine*: Vol. 63 : Iss. 1 , Article 22.

Available at: <https://scholarexchange.furman.edu/furman-magazine/vol63/iss1/22>

This Regular Feature is made available online by Journals, part of the Furman University Scholar Exchange (FUSE). It has been accepted for inclusion in Furman Magazine by an authorized FUSE administrator. For terms of use, please refer to the [FUSE Institutional Repository Guidelines](#). For more information, please contact scholarexchange@furman.edu.

Clockwise from top: Customers dine at Oak Hill Café and Farm. Bobby Daugherty '90 pictured at Old Europe Desserts. Tommy Stevenson '65 greets a patron at Tommy's Country Ham House.

THE COMEBACK

ICONIC EATS

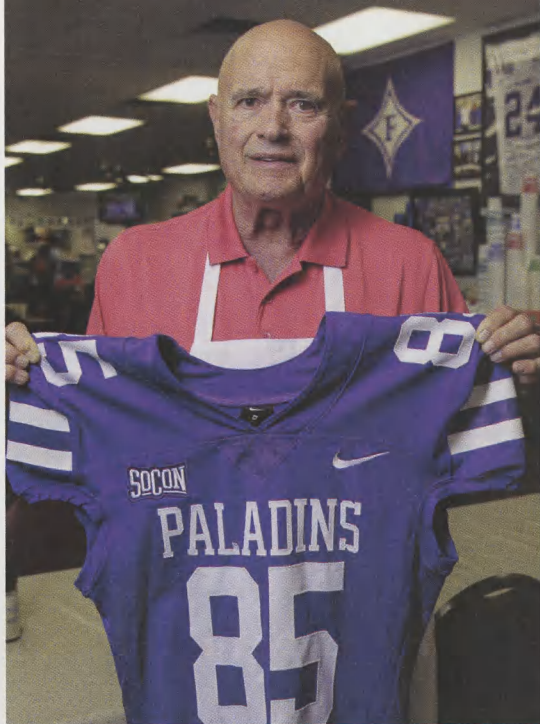


NEWFOUND TREATS

Three restauranteurs savor their special connection to Furman.

THERE IS NO SHORTAGE OF TEMPTING FARE IN GREENVILLE, SOUTH CAROLINA, BUT FOR A UNIQUELY FURMAN FLAVOR, THESE THREE SPOTS OFFER SOMETHING FOR EVERY PALATE.





Tommy Stevenson '65 holds up a Furman jersey bearing the year his restaurant opened and (right) chats with customers.

'THEY BECOME MY CHILDREN' TOMMY'S COUNTRY HAM HOUSE

By Ron Wagner '93

Every day, Tommy Stevenson '65 gets up at 2:30 a.m. He has to if he's going to make it to work on time, which is 3:30 a.m. And every day means every day. His restaurant, Tommy's Country Ham House, is open Sunday to Sunday.

"I cut all the meat," he says. "The meat that you eat today, I cut this morning."

By Stevenson's calculations, he works about 75 hours a week and has done so since he bought the place in 1985. That doesn't leave a lot of free time, but as any Furman football player over the past three decades will tell you, he's somehow always had time for them.

"When we play football on Saturday," Stevenson says, "I usually feed the team on Friday night. I get to know all the kids, and they become my children. I look after them any time I can."

He started out by giving free meals to the men's golf program before taking on the mighty appetite of 75 college football players in around 1987. His support for Furman isn't limited to those who wear helmets on Saturday. To this day, all Furman students get a 20% discount at Tommy's Country Ham House.

"When I went to school out there, I needed all the help I could get," Stevenson says.

Tommy's Country Ham House is one of the most iconic restaurants not only in Greenville but South Carolina, thanks largely to Stevenson's tireless dedication. Known for authentic and delicious Southern breakfasts with a friendly price tag, Tommy's has

achieved fame despite – or perhaps because of – its humble appearance. It also serves as a regular stop for presidential candidates on the campaign trail.

That fame happened by accident, however. Stevenson's relationship with Furman is intentional and stemmed from the desire to give back to his alma mater when he bought the old Country Ham House. ("Tommy's" was added when the restaurant moved to its current location on Rutherford Street in 1997.)

"I see all the home (football) games and go to a good many away games," he says. Asked to name the best Furman player he's seen, he doesn't hesitate.

"Probably Ingle Martin '06," Stevenson says, referring to the University of Florida transfer whose record-setting play at quarterback led the Paladins to their last FCS playoff semifinal appearance in 2005. "He was a great athlete and a great person on top of that. He could do it all."

November will mark 35 years that Stevenson has been operating Tommy's Country Ham House. Despite a health scare in 2018 that required heart and brain surgery, he has no plans to quit his restaurant or his special relationship with Furman.

"I've met some wonderful people through the years," he says. "It's good to see when the young men come back after they've graduated how they've matured and gotten jobs. That's rewarding."

tommyscountryhamhouse.com



THE RUNNING BACK & THE RUGELACH OLD EUROPE DESSERTS

By Ron Wagner '93

The first time **Bobby Daugherty '90** decided to make a go of it in Greenville, he left with a national championship. Success will be defined a little differently this time around, but the football-star-turned-entrepreneur expects it nonetheless with Old Europe Desserts, a European coffee and pastry shop he opened downtown in the summer of 2019.

“Being able to determine your own destiny is something that has always resonated with me. I was in financial sales, so if you did well you did very well. And if you didn’t do well, you sometimes had to eat peanut butter for three or four days in a row,” Daugherty says with a laugh. “So, I didn’t mind betting on myself.”

An outstanding running back at Owen High School, east of Asheville, North Carolina, Daugherty hadn’t heard of Furman when then-coach Dick Sheridan offered him a scholarship, but his mother had and insisted he become a Paladin. Turned out, she knew best.

Though a pair of major knee injuries cost Daugherty part of one year and all of another, he still rushed for 1,348 yards and 16 touchdowns in his career. The highlight was a team-leading 655 yards on 130 carries in 1988 – a season that culminated with the

Paladins beating Georgia Southern 17-12 to capture the national football title. “I should have scored that game, by the way,” Daugherty says.

Off the field, Daugherty went from an indifferent student to a motivated one aided in no small part by professors like David Roe, who mentored him and encouraged him to major in economics. That degree served as a springboard to a career with Smith Barney before Daugherty moved back to the Asheville area to take over his grandfather’s garbage-collection business, which netted a nice profit when he sold it. The experience also whetted his appetite to be a business owner.

Old Europe Desserts features an array of European-inspired treats, which have about half the sugar of their American counterparts, in addition to often being gluten-free. Daugherty himself isn’t big on sweets but saw a business opportunity in Old Europe Desserts.

“It’s an incredible challenge to run a business, and one that I really, truly cherish,” he says. “Furman was the best experience I could have had. Made me grow up, made me be accountable.”

oldeuropedesserts.com

JEREMY FLEMING



Clockwise from left: Ruth Stoltzfus, head pastry chef at Old Europe Desserts, prepares chocolate espresso roulade. An almond croissant from Old Europe Desserts. Owner **Bobby Daugherty '90** from behind the dessert counter. An espresso maker and tiramisu.



Clockwise from top: Lori Nelsen at work at Oak Hill Café, which she and chef David Porras opened in 2019. Spices and seasoning are carefully organized. Legumes and pork pastor.

Opposite page: A veggie burger with side garden salad. Andrew Olin makes a huckleberry tartlet with Porras pictured in the background.



A FARM OUT BACK, A 'SPACE LAB' UPSTAIRS

OAK HILL CAFÉ & FARM

By Cindy Landrum

To Lori Nelsen, there's a lot of similarity between a science lab and a kitchen.

"It's pretty easy to translate chemistry into the kitchen, especially if you're a baker, because there's so much precision in baking," says Nelsen, an analytical chemist.

Nelsen managed the biogeochemistry lab in Furman's earth and environmental science department for about a dozen years before exploring the restaurant venture. Her husband, Brent Nelsen, is a professor of politics and international affairs at Furman.

Eventually, Lori Nelsen, who cooked most evenings and baked when she could, decided to open a sustainable restaurant.

"At that time, there weren't any farm-to-table restaurants with a farm close by," she says.

She found an old house on a 2.4-acre plot on Poinsett Highway, just 3 miles south of the Furman campus.

"The Realtor thought I was crazy," she recalls.

But she needed a chef. And she found one at a most unexpected place – a 2016 party to welcome new Furman faculty members. Costa Rican chef David Porras, who had studied at the renowned Basque Culinary School in San Sebastian, Spain,

was there. Porras's wife, Karen Allen, had taken a one-year position in the earth and environmental science department.

"We talked for two hours," Nelsen says. "We had similar ideas about food. A lot of chefs don't care about sustainability, but David did. And we were both chemistry geeks about food."

But Porras wasn't sure he was ready to enter a new venture on the heels of a restaurant project in Costa Rica that had soured. But after he saw the property, he changed his mind and became a partner in Oak Hill Café and Farm.

Oak Hill Café opened in June of 2019, five years after Nelsen conceived the idea, and a year and a half after Porras agreed to come aboard. It serves breakfast, lunch and dinner, with most of the ingredients coming from the organic garden behind the restaurant. Furman employees and students receive a 10% discount for breakfast and lunch.

The restaurant's second floor contains a "space lab" with a freeze-dryer, a pressure cooker and a rotary evaporator. There, Nelsen, Porras and the rest of Oak Hill's kitchen staff experiment with different ingredients and what they can do with them.

oakhillcafe.com

Editor's note: At press time, all three restaurants had closed their dining spaces after South Carolina restaurants were ordered to halt in-house service during the COVID-19 pandemic. They were all offering pick-up orders, and Old Europe Desserts was also delivering orders and shipping them as far away as Washington, D.C., Orlando, Florida, and Charlotte, North Carolina. ♦