



A SUMMER-RIPE, TOMATO-RED WELCOME TO ALL YOU CAMP NASHVILLE PILGRIMS!

Those of you with SFA track records know that whenever these food fanatics organize an expedition, you're in for a mind-bending, taste-tempting journey into the heart of Southern cookery and culture. From Greensboro to Asheville to Austin, from Louisville to Birmingham to New Orleans, from the Mississippi Delta to the Carolina Lowcountry to the hills of Appalachia, the SFA wagon train rolls on, picking up old traditions, new recipes, timeless tales and forever friends on every field trip, day camp and road jaunt along the way.

And what could be a better and more timely destination than good ole Nashville in the dog days of August? After all, it's the high season here for the best home-grown Big and Better Boys & Girls, Beefsteaks, Bradleys and heirloom beauties that make this Mid-South location the utopian world capital of Tomato Heaven.

AND, just to underscore the point, this also happens to be the weekend of East Nashville's annual Tomato Arts Festival, spearheaded by arts entrepreneur Meg MacFadyen and lots of her public-spirited neighbors in this funky, friendly, trendy, tasty corner of Music City. How lucky can you get? For that matter, how lucky can *we* get to have all you Southern Foodways Alliance folks stopping in for some fun, just when Nashville—and her tomato harvest—is at its peak?

So have fun, y'all! The weather's on us!

--John Egerton

AN SFA THANK YOU

Primary sponsors of Camp Nashville are:

- The Catfish Institute
- Jack Daniel Tennessee Whiskey
- Jim 'N Nick's Bar-B-Q

Supporting sponsors include the Arnold's Country Kitchen, The Art & Invention Gallery, MacK & Kate's, Bill Ramsey, Martha Stamps, and Yazoo Brewery.

SFA thanks the local volunteers for welcoming us to your table: John Egerton, Rachel Lawson, Paul & Joy Martin, Ned Mitchell, Jim Myers, Tim O'Brien & Kit Swaggert, Martha Stamps, and Thomas Williams.

Directions to Camp Nashville Events

All directions are offered from the Loew's Vanderbilt Hotel.

Art & Invention Studio

1106 Woodland St.

Go NE on West End Ave. toward 21st Ave. South (0.7 miles)
Right onto 14th Ave. S (<.1 miles)
Take I-40 E (1.7 miles)
Merge I-24 W via exit 211B toward Clarksville (0.8 miles)
Take Exit 49 toward Shelby Ave./Colisuem (0.1 miles)
Left at the fork to go on S. 4th St. (0.1 miles)
Right onto Shelby Ave. (0.7 miles)
Left onto S. 10th St. (0.3 miles)
Right onto Woodland St. (<0.1 miles)
End at 1106 Woodland Ave.

Station Inn

402 12th Ave. South

Go NE on West End Ave. toward 21st Ave. S (0.8 miles)
Right on 402 12th Ave. S (0.3 miles)

Yazoo Brewery

1200 Clinton St.

Go NE on West End Ave. toward 21st Ave. S (0.7 miles)
Left on George L. Davis Blvd./US-70W (0.6 miles)
Left on Jo Johnston Ave. (<0.1 miles)
Right onto Clinton St. (<0.1 miles)

Arnold's Country Kitchen

605 8th Ave. South

Go NE on West End Ave. towards 21st Ave. S (0.4 miles)
Right on 17th Ave. S (0.1 miles)
17th Ave. S becomes Division St.; pass through one roundabout (0.8 miles)
Left onto 8th Ave. S (0.1 miles)

Hot Chicken Throwdown

1711 Sweetbriar Ave.

This is a private home, and parking is available on the street. Carpools are encouraged.

Go NE on West End Ave. towards 21st Ave. S (1.7 miles)
Left onto Sweetbriar Ave. (.5 miles)

CAMP NASHVILLE

Please note that this is a preliminary schedule. A final schedule and camper's handbook will be distributed at registration.

Friday, August 11

- 7:30 a.m. CAMPER BREAKFAST
We'll scout for breakfast at Silver Sands. We'll leave from the lobby at 7:30 a.m. on the dot—if you're late, you'll miss us! This is a BYOC event (Bring Your Own Car), but carpools are encouraged.
- 8:30 a.m. REGISTRATION
Loew's Vanderbilt Hotel
**Camp Lynchburg registration only*
- 9:00 a.m. CAMP LYNCHBURG
*55 lucky guests travel via bus to the Jack Daniel's Distillery
Lunch at Miss Mary Bobo's Boardinghouse, lectures on cooperage, revelations about blue laws, and a special-access tasting and tour.*
- 3:00-5:00 p.m. REGISTRATION FOR CAMP NASHVILLE
Loew's Vanderbilt Hotel Lobby
- DINING OUT, IN NASHVILLE
We'll point you to the best places in the city; you pick your destination.
- 7:00 p.m. ART & INVENTION'S TOMATO THROW-DOWN
Art & Invention Gallery, 1106 Woodland St.
Enjoy catfish BLTs by Sean Brock and Nashville's own Yazoo beer at this funky kickoff party for the East Nashville Tomato Art Festival.

Saturday, August 12

- 9:00 a.m. FRIED PIES FOR BREAKFAST AT THE STATION INN
402 12th Ave. South
*Meet E.W. Mayo, the king of fried sweet potato pies; taste his artistry.
View an SFA-produced film that documents his life.*
- MUSIC CITY MEAT-N-THREES
*Panel discussion moderated by John Egerton.
Special guests from Nashville's fabled meat-n-three dynasties
David Swett and Hap Townes*
- 11:00 a.m. NAVIGATING NASHVILLE
Campers will have handbooks to guide them through the city. Join in the East Nashville tomato toss. Enter the best dressed tomato competition. Refresh yourself at the Bloody Mary competition. Pack your guitar, head downtown, and tackle the music scene. It's up to you.

- 1:00 p.m. **BARBECUE and PC and BEER**
Yazoo Brewery, 1200 Clinton St.
Feast on a post-modern BLT and pulled-pork barbecue from Jim 'N Nick's, and quench your thirst with Yazoo Beer at Nashville's Marathon Motorworks Building.
- 7:00 p.m. **DINNER AT ARNOLD'S**
605 8th Ave. South
Bring your appetite, for we'll have hoe cakes, roast beef and gravy, and plenty more than three veggies. Music by Nashville roots rockers Kevin Gordon and Friends.
- 10:00 p.m. **HOT CHICKEN RUN AND BLUEGRASS SERENADE**
1711 Sweetbriar Drive
Meet Andre Prince Jeffries, mistress of Prince's Chicken Shack. View an SFA-produced film that documents her restaurant. Enjoy hot chicken, cold beer, and Martha Stamps's homemade s'more ice cream sandwiches. Parking is available on the street, and carpools are encouraged.

Camp Nashville Who's Who

Jack and Rose Arnold are co-proprietors of Arnold's Country Kitchen, a meat-and-three restaurant firmly schooled in the tradition of Hap Townes. Jack, a native of Asheville, North Carolina, came to Vanderbilt University in 1957. Rose, a native of Cartagena, Columbia, met Jack in Nashville in 1973. They married in 1974. In 1983, Jack, who had worked his way through school in Vanderbilt's dining halls, bought the cinderblock café that would become Arnold's Country Kitchen. Soon, Rose was alongside, working the cash register. And so it goes. Come lunch on weekdays, Arnold's dishes peerless greens and cornbread to both bespoke-suited lawyers and coverall-clad mechanics alike.

Sean Brock, age twenty-seven, is a wunderkind of Southern cookery. A native of Wise, Virginia, and a graduate of Johnson and Wales University, he was, until recently, chef at Nashville's Capitol Grill, where he won a reputation for daring by way of dishes like Barbecue Dippin' Dots. In April of this year, he moved south to Charleston, South Carolina where he is executive chef of McCrady's Restaurant. Among the dishes to emerge from his Carolina kitchen is caper and brown butter-dusted halibut with spinach, cauliflower puree, fingerling confit, and golden raisins.

John Egerton of Nashville is an independent writer of non-fiction. Among his books are *The Americanization of Dixie*, *Generations*, and *Speak Now Against the Day: The Generation Before the Civil Rights Movement in the South*, the latter of which won the Robert F. Kennedy Book Award. John is a founder of the SFA. In addition to editing the first edition of *Cornbread Nation: The Best of Southern Food Writing*, he wrote the reigning book on our region's culinary culture, *Southern Food: At Home, On the Road, In History*.

Kevin Gordon, a graduate of the prestigious Iowa Writers Workshop, is a singer-songwriter based in Nashville, Tennessee. His latest album is "O Come Look at the Burning," of which Buddy Miller said, "I love the record. I get transported to a beautiful, strange, familiar place. It's where the best music comes from. Deep and soulful. I can't take it off." His website is www.kevingordon.net. Gordon also operates a folk and vernacular art gallery, viewable at www.gordongallery.net.

André Prince Jeffries is the great grandniece of James Thornton Prince who, in the 1940s, opened a little take-out chicken joint at Twenty Eighth and Jefferson Streets. Today, Prince's Chicken Shack is recognized as among the most fabled fried chicken restaurants in America. Swabbed with hot sauce, the birds that emerge from Jeffries's skillets have inspired both song and film, including three ditties by Yo La Tengo and one documentary by the SFA's own Joe York.

E.W. Mayo, born in 1917, is the proprietor of Mayo's Mahalia Jackson Fried Chicken, the last vestige of a chain built around the fame of gospel singer Mahalia Jackson. Born in Cottage Grove, in northwestern Tennessee, E.W. Mayo has made his mark in Nashville with fried pies, utilizing the recipes of his mother, Eula Mayo, born in 1890, just one generation removed from the yoke of slavery. He is proud of his mother, prouder still of her pie recipe. "My mother invented the sweet potato pie," Mayo, will tell you. "I'm just carrying on what she started."

David Swett Jr., proprietor of Swett's Dinette, is the steward of a family meat-and-three tradition that dates to 1954, when Walter and Susie Swett first opened their doors. Though now famous for squash soufflé, stewed okra, and cornbread dressing, Swett's original focus was not food. "When my grandfather and grandmother started out, they were running what you might call a tavern," Swett Jr. recalls. "They had ten children and when it came time to eat, well, my grandmother would feed the children right there in the barroom. After a while—I guess her cooking must have smelled so good to them that they couldn't resist—customers started asking for the same food my father and the other children were eating."

Hap Townes was born in 1923. After a stint in the Air Force during World War Two, he followed in the footsteps of his father who, in 1921, opened an eponymous café in a converted street car on Nashville's Second Avenue. The junior Townes leveraged his father's success and earned a reputation for some of the best country cooking in the city. Stewed raisins, smothered pork chops and fried cornbread: until his retirement in the 1980s, Hap Townes was the man to see come noontime. Of late, he has devoted more time to his museum-quality art collection.

2006 East Nashville Tomato Art Fest

The Tomato...a Uniter, Not a Divider—Bringing Together Fruits and Vegetables

An abbreviated schedule for the East Nashville Tomato Art Festival follows. Some events will conflict with scheduled Camp Nashville activities, but we wanted you to know about them all the same. If you're dying to strut your stuff in the Second Line, or if you have a Bloody Mary recipe that just has been entered in the contest, we'll understand.

Bloody Mary Preliminaries at 3 Crow Bar

August 11, 7:00 p.m.

3 Crow Bar, 1020 Woodland Street

It's preliminary time for the Bloody Mary Contest. Come early in the evening. The judging for the eliminations will be based on the popular vote of the bar patrons at the Crow. The top 10 finalist will be invited to return to 3 Crow Bar Saturday, August 12th, at 3:00 p.m. so that the judges can crown (well, it's not really a crown) the BEST Bloody Mary of 2006!

Tomato King and Queen Pageant

August 11, 9:00 p.m.

Lipstick Lounge, 1400 Woodland Street

It's a festival, and you know it's not a REAL festival without a king and queen. Hang on to the vine, Little Tomatoes; there's going to be a pageant! Please be sure to attend the competition and coronation of East Nashville's Tomato King and Queen to be held Friday night at the Lipstick Lounge. Those girls at the Lipstick know how to throw a party, and we have no doubt that their pageant will be as fun as it gets. Ronda & Jonda's band is going to play Friday night with no cover charge, and we'll have the pageant before hand.

Most Beautiful Tomato Competition

August 12, 10:00 a.m.

Alegria, The East Garden and Mop Top, 307 N. 16th Street

Once again, it is time for the Beautiful Tomato Pageant at the 2006 Tomato Art Fest. This year's competition is brought to you by the shops of the 16th Street Corridor: Alegria, The East Garden and Mop Top. This is an equal opportunity pageant. We will accept entries of all sizes, orientation, and species of genuine tomatoes. Duct tape, Preparation H, and any sort of embellishment or creative theme is encouraged. However, any tomato discovered to have had plastic surgery will be immediately disqualified. No fake tomatoes allowed! Entry deadline is 11:00 a.m., and judging will begin at 12:00 p.m. Each contestant must have a title, description of tomato, and name of person entering. Winners and runners up will be announced, and prizes will be awarded at 12:15 p.m. In the case that the winner cannot fulfill it's duties as Most Beautiful Tomato, the runner up will automatically take the crown and the title. Only one entry per person is allowed. Awards will be given to the following two categories: entries for children from ages 4-14 and entries for ages 15 and up.

Woodland Street Bazaar

August 12, 10:00 a.m.

Art & Invention Gallery, 1106 Woodland Avenue

Up to thirty-seven different vendors will tempt and delight you with their wares. This outdoor bazaar is sure to be a hit, and the Tomato Art Fest is going to be its maiden voyage.

Heirloom Tomato Tasting & Organic Farmers Q&A
August 12, 11:00 a.m.
Turnip Truck, 970 Woodland Street

It is the perfect opportunity to taste the varied and wonderful flavors of heirloom tomatoes, courtesy of Marianne Jones of Marianna's Heirloom Seeds. Meet Raw Foodist, Laura Button, and don't be surprised if there are other savory tomato treats for you to sample. In addition, organic farmers will be on hand so you can take home the freshest produce available.

Second Line in East Nashville
August 12, Noon
Plowhaus Artist's Cooperative, 213 South 17th Street

Thanks to our many new neighbors from New Orleans, we have added an event to the Tomato Art Fest that is a time honored tradition in the Big Easy—the Second Line. Second Line is a moving daytime block party, and by its very nature it invites crowd participation. Parade your tomato spirit as you walk through the streets behind a brass band. Costumes, umbrellas, handkerchiefs, and any kind of festive wear is encouraged! We will start at the Plowhaus at high noon and wind our way on the sidewalks to Five Points where the brass band leading the Second Line will take the stage to kick off the day's Music.

Tomato Music
August 12, beginning at Noon
Germantown Partners Lot (Next to the Post Office on Woodland Street)

We will kick off the music for the Tomato Art Fest with our New Orleans brass band, Delicious Blues Stew. The good news is they are only the beginning of an extraordinary lineup that continues throughout the day!

1:00 p.m.	Delicious Blues Stew
1:45 p.m.	Volatile Baby
2:30 p.m.	Mark Holder
3:15 p.m.	BeatinPath
4:00 p.m.	Phantom Five
4:45 p.m.	Mayberry LSD
5:30 p.m.	David Ashley Band
6:15 p.m.	When Country Wasn't Cool
7:00 p.m.	Stephen Belin Band
7:45 p.m.	Side Show Bennie
8:30 p.m.	Pale Blue Dot
9:15 p.m.	Big Baby

Talk Tomato at the Turnip Truck with Bernie Ellis
August 12, 1:45-2:30 p.m.
The Turnip Truck, 970 Woodland Street

Master Gardener Bernie Ellis will be on hand to give you tips on how to grow picture perfect, delicious organic tomatoes.

Bloody Mary Contest Finals
August 12, 3:00 p.m.
3 Crow Bar, 1020 Woodland Street

The top 10 Bloody Mary finalists will be invited to return to 3 Crow Bar on Saturday, August 12th, at 3:00 p.m. so our judges can crown the best Bloody Mary of 2006.

Post-Modern BLT Recipe Contest
August 12, 4:00 p.m.
The Yellow House, 1110 Woodland Street

The heat of summer is here, and with the heat comes homegrown tomatoes. Bursting with juice. Sweet and fluent. Everyone loves a BLT: tomatoes, paired with country-cured bacon and a sheathe of iceberg lettuce, the whole affair layered between shingles of white bread. The Tomato Art Fest is in search of Nashville's best BLT. Bring your sandwich, and a copy of the recipe, to the Yellow House (2 doors down from Art & Invention) at 4 p.m. on Saturday. Judging will commence at 4:30 p.m., and winners will be announced at 5:30 p.m.

Tomato Art Show and Reception
August 12, 6:30 p.m.
Art & Invention Gallery, 1106 Woodland Street

The Art & Invention Gallery was voted the #2 Favorite Gallery in the *Nashville Scene* Reader's Poll, just behind the Frist Museum. Now Art & Invention may not have exhibits of Old Masters or ancient Egyptian artifacts, but they sure do know how to showcase a tomato! The artwork of over 100 talented artists is on display at this beloved art show. Apparently, there is no limit to the ways that a tomato can be interpreted, and we have proof of that with work ranging from the hysterically funny to the exquisitely beautiful.

In the spirit of unity, (and in keeping with our motto, "The Tomato...a Uniter, Not a Divider—Bringing Together Fruits and Vegetables"), we have decided to include a room for emerging fruit and vegetable art at this year's Tomato Art Fest.

TOMATO ART + EMERGING FRUIT & VEGETABLE ART = A VISUAL FEAST!

A Note on the Post-Modern BLT Contest

The heat of summer approaches. And with the heat come homegrown tomatoes. Bursting with juice. Sweet and fluent. Paired with country-cured bacon and a sheath of iceberg lettuce, the whole affair layered between shingles of white bread.

Last year, at an event in Napa, California, chef John Currence of Oxford, Mississippi, threw down the gauntlet with a fine catfish BLT. We were impressed. So at the August 11-12 Camp Nashville, SFA features catfish BLT's from chef Sean Brock, a onetime Nashville resident now cooking at McCrady's in Charleston, South Carolina.

Though we recognize that the marriage of bacon, lettuce, tomato, and catfish is inspired, SFA wondered how you accessorize and improvise your BLT's. So we asked. And you told us. Y'all do some wild things with BLTs. Some of you don't even include the three main ingredients, but you still claim that your creation is a BLT. We took your word for it. Others add so many extra letters between the white bread that we don't see how you hold your sandwich together, but it sure sounds good. And then there's that third category, that group of people who do not consider sandwiches a convenience food. These recipes call for a committed day in the kitchen.

A sampling of the responses to our call for recipes may be viewed online at www.southernfoodways.com. Feeling inspired? Send us your favorite BLT recipe by September 1, and we'll add it to the mix. The Tomato Art Festival is even getting involved; their annual tomato recipe contest calls for BLT ideas, and they'll crown a local winner on Saturday night. Until then, savor this concoction, which will be served to us courtesy of Jim 'N Nick's when we dine at Yazoo Brewery.

The Way South of the Ordinary BLT Courtesy of Jim 'N Nick's Bar-B-Q

We had to travel pretty far South for our version of the BLT. Past Birmingham and Oxford, over the Rio Grande, across borders and languages and even through time. Our inspiration went back to 3000 BC to the Valle De Tehuacan, in the state of Puebla, in the shadows of the Sierra Madre mountains. There the Mayans gave us corn, followed quickly by the gift of tortillas, soft and warm. That gift is now the wrapping for our BLT. A fresh corn tortilla, filled with a surprise—a BLT salad. Yes, a salad, made from chopped heirloom tomatoes, applewood smoked bacon, fresh basil and baby lettuces. A splash of lime juice, a bit of chopped avocado and the finest olive oil are tossed in for good measure. It's finished with a dollop of homemade chive mayonnaise and wrapped up, warm and ready, for the tasting.

Nashville: To Eat, To Do, To See

Nashville has long been a crossroads of what we call today the mid-South. The food reflects much of that, as we borrow from most of the culinary traditions that surround the long width of the state. The “three grand divisions” (flat cotton country of West Tennessee, rolling hills of Middle Tennessee, and the high lonesome Appalachian twang of East Tennessee) have their own distinct flavors as well.

The city of Nashville, though, sits in a basin that may have helped protect many of the older food traditions that seem to persist where they’ve disappeared in other cities of the same size. In many ways, Nashville is a city come lately, and finds itself in a tremendous boom epoch. That makes preservation all the more important, lest progress wipe away the true flavors of the city.

One food institution that remains is the classic Southern plate lunch joint, mom-and-pop places that serve what came to be known simply as home cookin’. They’re cleverly called meat-and-threes, though most folks just order a meat and two sides and save room for a piece of pie or some cobbler. Places with more African-American flavor and history skew more to the soul food side of the scale, but as we learned at the SFA symposium a couple years back, much of the food is the same.

Country ham, pulled pork barbecue (served on corn cakes with slaw), searing-hot fried chicken, fish sandwiches, biscuits and Tennessee whiskey (not bourbon) are all part of the culinary landscape. Add to the staples a growing list of haute Southern experiments, restaurants that push the boundaries of grits and molecular barbecue, and you can taste Nashville’s evolution as it happens, at a pace that’s both fascinating and frightening.

Below you’ll find a select list of some eateries established and new, some of which you will enjoy during Camp Nashville. These are points of departure for exploration

Hot Chicken Joints

Note: All three will be represented at the hot chicken throwdown Rolands jamboree Saturday night.

Prince’s Hot Chicken

123 Ewing Dr.
615-226-9442

Hours: Noon-10 p.m. Tues-Thurs; Noon-4 a.m. Fri-Sat

Run by the grande dame of hot bird, Andre Prince Jeffries, Prince’s is the undisputed champion and originator of hot chicken as we know it in Nashville. A chicken sandwich is, in reality, a leg or breast quarter, perched atop two slices of white bread and speared with a toothpick and pickle chip for good measure. The taste of the cayenne-grease stained white bread underneath the chicken is being tested as the possible sixth taste, one level beyond umami, and just shy of a peyote-induced vision questest.

Bolton’s Spicy Chicken & Fish

624 Main St.
615-254-8015

Hours: 11 a.m.-9 p.m. Tues-Thurs; 11 a.m.-Midnight Fri-Sat

The first offshoot of the Prince’s line was started by Bolton Polk. His nephew, Bolton Matthews continues the tradition using Polk’s original cast-iron skillets. Not as scorching hot as Prince’s, but plenty of flavorful kick.

400 Degrees

2012-C Clarksville Hwy.
615-244-4467

The latest entry in the esophageal erosion sweepstakes, 400 Degrees serves up a fine spiced hot chicken sandwich. Started by Aquí Simpson, who grew up eating at Prince’s and worked at the recipe until she felt she got it right.

Meat-and-Threes/Soul Food Restaurants

Note: Most of these places are open only for breakfast and lunch during the week, and most only accept cash.

Arnold's Country Kitchen

605 Eighth Ave. South

615-256-4455

Hours: 10:30 a.m.-2:45 p.m. Mon-Fri

Jack and Rose Arnold are as entertaining as their food is good. On most days, he's carving out jokes as he carves the roast beef, while she mans the register and Jack. Their meatloaf has legions of fans, and their fried green tomatoes buck trends with a hint of Italian seasoning.

Carolyn's Homestyle Kitchen

330 Charlotte Pike

615-255-1008

Hours: 10:30 a.m.-1:45 p.m. Mon-Thur; 10 a.m.-1:55 p.m. Fri

Located in the old columned Sunday School Publishing Board building (this is the Buckle of the Bible Belt, after all), Carolyn's does a brisk downtown lunch business, especially on fried chicken day.

Dairy King

431 E Thompson Ln.

615-833-7362

Hours: 10:30 a.m.-7 p.m. Mon-Fri

One of the last of the old drive-in ice cream stands, you can also get plate lunches and mighty fine chocolate fried pie.

Silver Sands

937 Locklayer St.

615-742-1652

Hours: 5 a.m.-2:30 p.m. Mon-Fri

With pigs feet on the menu almost every day, this is one of the last of the true, old-school, soul food joints. And don't forget that gobsmakingly good breakfast hash.

Swett's Restaurant

2725 Clifton Ave.

615-329-4418

Hours: 11 a.m.-8 p.m. Mon-Sun

Still family-owned, on any given day Swett's is filled with students from nearby Fisk and Tennessee State Universities, downtown politicians, and just about anyone looking for a good plate of Southern cooking.

Sylvan Park

4502 Murphy Rd.

615-292-9275

Hours: 10:30 a.m.-7:30 p.m. Mon-Fri; 10:30 a.m.-6:30 p.m. Sat; closed Sun

Known as much for their pies as everything else, this restaurant has anchored the historic Sylvan Park neighborhood for more than 50 years.

Wendell Smith's Restaurant

407 53rd Ave. North

615-383-7114

Hours: 10:30 a.m.-2 p.m. Monday-Friday

Eat your fill, then wander next door to the adjoining liquor store, a marvelous symbiosis. Entire restaurant is still unabashedly smoker friendly.

Other Favorite Nashville Eats

Bobbie's Dairy Dip

5301 Charlotte Pike

615-292-2112

Hours: 11 a.m.-10p.m. Mon-Sat, Noon to 10 p.m. Sun (Open during warm months only)

Like the old Dairy King, but with great burgers, high butter-fat content soft serve, Belgian-style fires.

Cabana

1912 Belcourt Ave.

615-577-2262

Hours: 4 p.m.-2 a.m.

The place and people can be a little hipper-than-thou but the throw-open-the-doors setting of this Hillsboro village restaurant and bar is indeed cool and the Tennessee Sliders (sweet potato biscuits stuffed with Allan Benton's ham) are undeniably great.

Capitol Grille

231 Sixth Ave. North

888-888-9414

Hours: 6:30 a.m.-10 p.m. Mon-Sun

Chef Sean Brock's last stint was here at the Capitol Grille, but he's turned things over now to Tyler Brown. In addition to kindly operating as the catfish BLT order hub, they serve creative southern cuisine in an elegant atmosphere.

Farmers Market

900 8th Ave. North

615-880-2001

Hours: 8 a.m.-6 p.m., Mon-Sun

In the shadow of Tennessee's State Capitol hill, the city's Farmers Market is a large enclosed building with food vendors, flanked by large open-air sheds with local produce purveyors and other produce resellers. The current location, home to the market since 1995, backs up to Bicentennial State Park.

K&S Market

4224 Nolensville Pike

615-832-8881

Word market located in an old department store, this huge place has aisles for almost every ethnicity in town, from dry goods and familiar brands, to variety cuts of meat, live fish and about ten varieties of cabbage (owners are Korean). It's a reminder of the changing face of the city. And did we mention there's a beer section, featuring Dutch, Russian, Mexican, and Asian brews?

La Hacienda Taqueria

2615 Nolensville Rd.

615-256-6142

Hours: 10 a.m.-9 p.m. Mon-Thurs; 10 a.m.-10 p.m. Fri-Sat; 9 a.m.-9 p.m. Sun

Started as a tortilla factory to serve the growing Hispanic population, the small market evolved into one of the city's most popular Mexican restaurants, introducing us to authentic dishes like menudo, pozole, whole fried huachinango.

Las Paletas

2907 12th Ave. South

615-386-2101

Hours: Noon-7 p.m. Tues-Sat

The fabulous Paz sisters, from Guadalajara, opened this gourmet Mexican Popsicle stand a few years ago, and word of mouth keeps them busy.

MacK & Kates's

415 Main St., Kingston Springs

615-952-9511

Hours: 11 a.m.-2 p.m. Tues-Fri; 5:30-9:30 p.m. Tues-Sat

Named after owner Jan Strawn's two daughters (yes, MacK does spell her name with a capital K), MacK & Kate's Wine Bar in Kingston Springs is worth the thirty-minute trek from downtown Nashville. Try the crab cakes or the portabella mushrooms for starters, and finish with the crème brulee. You won't go wrong with anything from the middle of their menu either. It's all good.

Margot's Café & Bar

1016 Woodland St.

615-227-4668

Hours: 6-10 p.m. Tues-Sat; bar opens at 5 p.m.

This is the center of East Nashville's fine dining landscape. Chef Margot McCormack uses local ingredients to craft her menu, which changes daily. There's an extensive wine list, too.

Martha's at the Plantation

5025 Harding Pike

615-353-2828

Hours: 11 a.m.-2 p.m. Mon-Sat; 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Sun

Martha Stamps is too young to be a doyenne, but represents fancy southern dining with grace and charm at her restaurant inside the gift center at the Belle Meade Plantation.

Mary's Old Fashion Barbeque Pit

1108 Jefferson St.

615-256-7696

Hours: Noon - 10 p.m. Sun; 8 a.m.-Midnight Mon-Thurs; 8 a.m.-2 a.m. Fri-Sat

Late night hours make this drive-up barbecue joint popular on hot summer nights. Try the pulled pork between two corn cakes with slaw and hot sauce, and you'll testify to their restorative powers.

Molly P Eatery

85 White Bridge Rd.

615-353-3995

Hours: 8 a.m.-8 p.m. Mon-Fri; 8 a.m.-6 p.m. Sat

Martha Stamps's latest venture hearkens back to the old lunch counters inside pharmacies. Eclectic menu of flatbread pizzas and salads.

Pop's BBQ

701 28th Ave. N Ste. B

615-321-4004

Hours: Noon-6 p.m. Sun; 10:30 a.m.-9 p.m. Mon-Thurs; 10:30 a.m.-11 Fri-Sat

In addition to the usual smoked subjects, they pop's makes some mean goat barbecue and just might be the only place in town that still has chitterlings on the menu.

Provence Breads & Cafe

1705 21st Ave. South

615-386-0363

www.provencebreads.com

Hours: 7a.m.-7p.m. Mon-Sat, 8 a.m.-6p.m. Sun

Classic European-style bakery keeps the city happy with large Tuscan loaves, boules and baguettes.

Rotier's

2413 Elliston Place

615-327-9892

Hours: 10:30 a.m.-10 p.m. Mon-Fri; 9 a.m.-10 p.m. Sat

A grilled cheeseburger, onion rings, and a chocolate shake are the best bets at this diner, a favorite of Vanderbilt students. The meat-and-three menu changes daily, but you'll always find fried chicken and roast beef as a selection. Breakfast is offered on Saturdays only, but bottled beer is available all the time.

Watermark

507 12th Ave. South

615-254-2000

www.watermark-restaurant.com

Hours: 5:30-10 p.m. Monday-Thursday and 5:30-11 p.m. Friday-Saturday; bar opens at 5 p.m.

Borne of the Frank Stitt tradition with management and a chef who came from Birmingham, Watermark elevated the city's Southern-inspired haute scene last year when it opened in the Gulch.

Zola

3001 West End Ave.

(615) 320-7778

Hours: **5:30-10:00 p.m. Mon-Thurs; 5:30-11 p.m. Fri-Sat**

This Vanderbilt area favorite is run by Chef Deborah Paquette, the first woman in the state of Tennessee to become a Certified Executive Chef. The award-winning menu features fresh fish and seafood, as well as vegetarian-friendly options.

Sunday Brunch

If you still have an appetite after our weekend eating marathon, Nashville offers a full menu of brunch options. The listings below are scattered all over the city (and a few of these are outside municipal limits), but all these destinations are worth a Sunday drive.

Athens Family Restaurant

2526 Franklin Rd.
615-383-2848

Hours: 7 a.m.-9 p.m. Monday-Saturday; 8 a.m.-7 p.m. Sunday

The restaurant may look like an old fast food joint (that's what it was), but husband and wife team Yanni and Dina Panagiotakis's restaurant offers the incredible Greek food their name implies. Gyros and stuffed grape leaves are on the menu, of course, but breakfast is the hidden treasure here. Try a Greek omelette (tomatoes, onions, spinach, and feta), or—for a heartier appetite—try Yanni's special breakfast. It has too many ingredients to list.

Beacon Light Tea Room

6343 Highway 100, Bon Aqua
931-670-3880

Hours: 4-10 p.m. Tuesday-Friday; 9 a.m.-10 p.m. Saturday-Sunday

Right down Highway 100, about thirty minutes outside of town in Bon Aqua, there's a little restaurant that offers Sunday morning religion and the best biscuits around Nashville. Order country ham and red-eye gravy, or try the skillet-fried chicken. You won't find brunch cocktails on this menu, but the coffee's good. Bible verses are in a tabletop breadbox so you can read while you wait, or browse the religious art for sale on the walls.

Loveless Café

8400 Highway 100
615-646-9700

Hours: 7 a.m.-9 p.m. daily

About fifteen miles southwest of downtown, near the entrance to the Natchez Trace Parkway, the Loveless Café serves up biscuits and country ham, chicken and waffles, and veggie plates loaded with turnip greens, field peas, and creamed corn. Its popularity encouraged renovations a few years ago, and though the atmosphere might seem a bit touristy, the food is worth the drive. Buy postcards in the gift shop while you wait.

Martha's at the Plantation

5025 Harding Pike
615-353-2828

Hours: 11 a.m.-2 p.m. Monday to Saturday, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Sunday

Even though Martha Stamps will be up late on Saturday night feeding us ice cream sandwiches to counter that hot chicken burn, her restaurant at Belle Meade Plantation will be ready to welcome brunch guests on Sunday morning. Try the fried green tomatoes as a precursor to the biscuits and gravy, or enjoy some Benton's Country Ham with eggs and toast.

Noshville

1918 Broadway
615-329-6674

Hours: 6:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m. Monday, 6:30 a.m.-9 p.m. Tuesday-Thursday, 6:30 a.m.-10:30 p.m. Friday, 7:30 a.m.-10:30 p.m. Saturday, 7:30 a.m.-9 p.m. Sunday

The Statue of Liberty (with her Vanderbilt basketball jersey) atop this favorite deli clues customers that this is no ordinary Nashville deli; it's Nashville's New York deli. Order lox and bagels, the smoked fish platter, or the grilled Reuben for Sunday brunch. Omelettes and Tennessee-sized French toast are other favorites, and you should snack on the complimentary pickles left on each table while you await your order.

Pancake Pantry

1796 21st Ave. S
615-383-9333

Hours: 6 a.m.-3 p.m. Monday-Friday, 6 a.m.-4 p.m. Saturday-Sunday

Drive through Hillsboro Village, and you'll inevitably see it: a long line of people, wrapping down the sidewalk, all waiting on pancakes. They claim that even the celebrities wait in line here, patiently savoring the thought of two full menu pages of buttermilk pancake varieties. Breakfast is served all day and, well, pancakes are the best bet at the Pancake Pantry. Reservations? Not a chance...

To See and Do: Downtown

We know, we know—it's supposed to be the Music City. And the music's good, no doubt, but Nashville offers a lot more than just line dancing! In your free time, check out this sampling of Nashville adventures waiting to happen. We've grouped these suggestions into two categories, downtown and "not downtown." Check your maps, start your engines.

The Arts Company

215 5th Ave. North
615-254-2040

Hours: 10 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Mon-Sat

This downtown art gallery has two floors of the funkier art in the city. Current exhibits include paintings by Memphis native Lamar Sorrento and wooden paintbrushes by Cleveland, Mississippi, native Ron Koehler (trust us, they're cool). Check out the Crayola art on the second floor; the new crayon smell and creativity are a great mix.

Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum

222 Fifth Ave. South
800-852-6437

An excellent museum that traces the roots of all genres of country music (bluegrass, Cajun, cowboy, honkytonk, rockabilly, modern country) through both popular exhibits and serious ethnomusicology studies. Also, as the name implies, home to the Country Music Hall of Fame, not to mention a great, kitschy gift shop.

Ernest Tubb Record Shop

417 Broadway
(615) 255-7503

Hours: 9-10 SunThurs; 9-Midnight Fri-Sat

Once the home of *Midnight Jamboree*, a radio show that aired after the Opry, the Ernest Tubb Record Shop is the place to buy music in the city. The selection, honestly, is about as good as anywhere else, but the music just feels more country when it's purchased on Lower Broad.

Frist Center for the Visual Arts

919 Broadway
615-244-3340

Hours: 10:30 a.m.-9 p.m. Mon and Fri; 10:30 a.m.-5 p.m. Tues-Thursday and Sat; 1-5 p.m. Sun

The Frist Center, built in 2001, does not house a permanent collection but instead hosts world-class traveling exhibits. While SFA is in town, there'll be two: "Pulitzer Prize Photographs: Capture the Moment," showcases over 120 images drawn from each year's winning entries since the Pulitzer Prize was established in 1941. "The Quest for Immortality: Treasures of Ancient Egypt" requires a separate admission fee, but guests can see a full scale reproduction of the burial chamber of pharaoh Thutmose III.

Hatch Show Print

316 Broadway
615-256-2805

Hours: 9:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Monday- Friday, 10:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Saturday

Opened in 1879, Hatch has been churning out letterpress posters ever since. They used to make the giant barn bills announcing traveling minstrel shows, but it was the manager for some kid name Presley who took a shine to old print shop. A lot of reproduction posters of Opry stars available, using the original, wood-cut blocks.

Hermitage Hotel

231 Sixth Avenue North
888.888.9414

Historic hotel in the heart of downtown. Last residence of billiard hustler Minnesota Fats and the location where the Tennessee legislature met to decide whether to ratify the amendment giving women the right to vote (Tennessee was the swing state and deciding vote). Also home to chef Sean Brock's last stint, the Capitol Grille, and the coolest men's bathroom (women may visit) in town.

Ryman Auditorium

116 Fifth Ave. North
615-254-1445

Hours: 9 a.m.-4 p.m. daily

This National Historic Landmark, as country music fans know, is the real home of the Grand Ole Opry. You'll feel a bit touristy when you pay admission to wander through the self-guided tour of this great hall, but when you're given the opportunity to stand on stage and look out at the pews, you'll feel the spirit of Hank Williams and it'll all be worth it. Allow an hour for the tour if you're a die-hard fan who likes to linger, or just scoot through quickly to say you've been there. You won't regret it.

Station Inn

402 12th Ave. South
615-255-3307

Open since 1974, this nondescript granite building in the Gulch is home base for Nashville's bluegrass music community. Every Tuesday through Sunday, this tidy little bar hosts what many consider the best bluegrass shows in the nation. And the folks who work there couldn't be nicer.

Tennessee State Capitol

Charlotte Ave, between 6th and 7th Ave.
615-7412692

Hours: 10 a.m.-5 p.m Mon-Fri

This Greek Revival building is made from Tennessee limestone and marble that slaves and convict laborers quarried and cut. This state capital is Nashville's second presidential resting place; President and Mrs. James K. Polk are buried on the grounds.

Tootsie's Orchid Lounge

422 Broadway
615-726-0463

Hours: 10-3 a.m., daily

This famous watering hole is located just across the alley from the historic Ryman Auditorium, and so it was a favorite spot for Opry entertainers who liked to sneak out the back door between sets and get a nip. The vibe is all touristy now, as is true for most places on Lower Broad, but there's still a mystique worth checking out.

To See and Do: Outside of Downtown

Belle Meade Mansion

5025 Harding Rd.
615-356-0501

Hours: 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday-Saturday; 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Sunday. Last tour 4 p.m. Closed Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's Day

Ante-bellum property and horse farm that produced the first American-born horse to cross the pond and win the English Darby. Look for pock marks on the limestone columns where bullets hit the house during the Civil war. Leave with the knowledge that President Howard Taft once got stuck in the bathtub here.

Belmont Mansion

1900 Belmont Blvd.
615-460-5459

Hours: 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Monday - Saturday, 1 p.m. - 4 p.m. Sunday. Last tour 3:15 p.m. Closed on major holidays.

Adelicia Acklen was, in her 19th Century day, one of the wealthiest women in the country. She married often, and well, amassing a fortune in land and property. Only someone with her wiles could get cotton through the Union Blockades to England. Belmont, built in 1849, was one of her summer estates, an escape from Louisiana heat, and now anchors Belmont University, which has one of the best music business programs in the country.

Bluebird Café

4104 Hillsboro Rd.
615-383-1461

Hours: Shows usually at 6 and 9 p.m.

This small club is located in an unassuming strip mall across from the Green Hills mall. It doesn't look like a happening spot for live music, but it is. Songwriters play music in the round, usually two shows each night. The first one's free, but the second one charges a cover at the door. Reservations are suggested.

Brown's Diner

Corner of Blair Blvd. and 21st Ave.
Hours: Noon-10 p.m. daily

Also known as Brown's Rehearsal Hall, this is the home of the oldest beer license in the city. Meet Kimbro, the avid Cardinals fan and junior bartender; he's only worked there for eighteen years. If you like draft beer, Budweiser is your only option; note that the tap is too short to fit a pitcher underneath, so the bartender has to top it off using an extra glass they keep handy.

Centennial Park/Parthenon

Corner, West End and 25th Ave.
615-862-8431

Nashville centennial celebration (1896) produced a replica of the Parthenon, the temple that graces Athens acropolis. We still claim the title Athens of the South for the number of institutions of higher learning in the city. The original Parthenon in the park burned, but it was rebuilt just shy of exact scale. Note the giant bronze doors and inside, the largest indoor sculpture in the western hemisphere, the towering figure of Athena herself.

Cheekwood

1200 Forrest Park
515-356-8000

Hours: 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Tues-Sat; 11 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Sun

Built by the Cheek family (hence the clever name), which made its fortune on the caffeine addiction of Americans through Maxwell House Coffee. It's a stunning mansion filled with architectural elements purchased in Europe, and houses a permanent art collection. The landscaping and botanical gardens are on the grounds that surround the mansion on the hill.

The Hermitage

4580 Rachel's Lane (accessible via I-40 or I-65)

615-889-2941

Hours: 9 a.m.-5 p.m., daily

Feeling the itch for some presidential history? Visit the Hermitage, home to President Andrew Jackson. The main house and outbuildings are all a part of the museum, which offers a self-guided tour of the grounds. Salute the former Commander in Chief at his tomb.

Opryland Hotel

2800 Opryland Dr.

615-889-1000

Hours: Open daily, 24/7

It's a sight that really defies description. Just past the endless road construction, past the enormous outlet mall, there sits a hotel with 2800+ rooms and three atria, all covered by more than eight acres of glass to create Nashville's largest greenhouse. See indoor streams, beautiful tropical planets, and a laser light waterfall show choreographed to the beat of Nashville's newest country hit. Be sure to stop in one of the many giftshops to buy your "I've been to Opryland" t-shirt before you trek back to the parking lot.

Radnor Lake

1160 Otter Creek Rd.

615-373-3467

Hours: daylight

This 1118 acre site, nestled within the steep Overton Hills only eight miles from downtown Nashville, is a popular sanctuary among birdwatchers and photographers. Known as "Nashville's Walden Pond," 85 acre Radnor Lake offers unmatched scenic beauty and opportunities for quiet reflection and nature observation. The area features six miles of easy to strenuous walking trails and scheduled interpretive programs. Visitors Center: daily Sunday-Monday: 9 a.m. - 5 p.m., Tuesday-Thursday: 8 a.m. - 5 p.m., Friday-Saturday: 8 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Standard Candy Company

Makers of GooGoo candy and, before they sold it off, King Leo Peppermint Sticks. Dating back to 1912, Goo Goo aficionados claim that GooGoo's are the world's first combination candy bar. While you're in town, per the Opry, you've "gotta get a GooGoo!" Look for their products in better convenience stores across town.

Mystery of the Meat-and-Three Mecca

For years I have tried to make sense of why Nashville is so blessed with great plate lunch places, why this middle Tennessee town is a meat 'n' three mecca, with more than a half-dozen great restaurants to choose from, while cities of equal or larger size—say Atlanta or Birmingham or Charlotte—can claim only a couple or three truly great lunch spots.

And then it hit me: Nashville is a country-come-to-town kind of town, drawing backwoods pickers and small-town singers to Music City like bees to a hive. Out of the hills and hollers of Appalachia they came, guitars slung over their shoulders, dreams of a date at the Grand Ole Opry dancing in their heads. And with them came a host of friends and family, in town to trade in the city's markets or visit their congressman at the state capitol. Doesn't it stand to reason that they brought along a taste for the foods of their birth, the foods of the hills — salt-cured ham and skillet-fried corn, kettles of cabbage and pones made of sweet potato? And what is a meat-and-three restaurant after all? I mused. Why it's nothing more than country cooking come to town, the noonday groaning board feast replicated for the modern age.

It was a good theory, or so I thought until I tried it out on my friend John Egerton, author of the wonderful book, *Southern Food: At Home, On the Road, In History*. Back in 1987 he had pondered the same question and come up wanting. Kind man that he is, John let me down gently. "I like the theory," he said. "But it just won't hold water, especially when you think about a town like Birmingham that drew people from the surrounding rural areas to work in the steel mills and coal fields. Why don't they have the same tradition of meat 'n' three restaurants? No, I think this is the kind of thing you just thank your lucky stars for, the kind of blessing you chalk up to unearned grace."

--John T. Edge

Friday, 04/01/05
The Tennessean

Fiery fried chicken

By JIM MYERS
Staff Writer

Smoldering, spicy poultry the hottest trend

Researchers have long-studied the evolutionary links of pleasure and pain in parts of our brain. Perhaps if they were to delve just a little deeper, they would discover a small cluster of neurons heretofore unknown.

This further investigation would show some weird connection where subjects, when given high doses of capsicum-laced poultry grease, would show a tremendous pain response, coupled with the inability to stop eating, followed by the glow of a preternatural sense of satisfaction.

And I expect that whoever discovers this bio-culinary breakthrough will name it Hot Chicken Syndrome (HCS). A Nobel Prize would surely follow.

Hot chicken has ruled the roost of Nashville's culinary treasure chest for a long time. Sure, we have the typical buffet of country ham, beaten biscuits, grits and jams and a panoply of barbecue, but so does the rest of the South. Only Nashville has chicken that will make your tongue cry and your sinuses weep.

If you've never had hot chicken, the first thing you need to do is get rid of notions of weeny wings and dainty drumettes. Leave those for the people of Buffalo. In Nashville, hot chicken is synonymous with the word "sandwich," and there are two varieties: leg/thigh or breast/wing.

That's right. Perched on a plate are two slices of white bread with a bone-in piece of fried chicken resting on top, staining them with greasy drippings. The crusty skin on the chicken ranges in color from light orange-red to a dark russet, not so subtle hints at the depth of fire. Topping it all are pickle slices anchored with a toothpick. It is a thing of beauty that can trigger spontaneous sweating.

The undisputed queen mother of hot chicken is André Prince, the owner of Prince's Hot Chicken Shack, who traces her brood lines all the way back to her great uncle, Thornton Prince, the man that myth credits as the "inventor" of hot chicken.

"Well, he didn't really invent it. He had quite a reputation as a womanizer, and I guess one of his girlfriends got angry and poured pepper on his chicken, trying to punish him," she says with a chuckle.

Customers took to the spicy bird and Thornton's Bar-B-Q Chicken Shack grew out of its original location at 28th and Jefferson, moving to Ninth and Cedar and then, finally, to 17th and Charlotte, where most old-timers recall getting their hot-chicken fix. That's where a sign once stood directing white patrons to a room in back, behind the kitchen.

After Thornton's death, his brother and sister-in-law, Will and Maude Prince, took over the Bar-B-Q Shack. It was during Maude's tenure that Bolton and Frances Polk started learning the hot-chicken trade, eventually going out on their own when André Prince took over, moved the Shack out to the Clarkesville Highway and changed the name to reflect the family behind it.

"It always bothered me that it was called the Bar-B-Q Chicken Shack, because it wasn't barbecue. It's always been fried," she says, clearly proud of the Prince family claim.

In the meantime, Bolton Polk carved out his own success, with his own recipe, at the foot of the old Shelby Street Bridge in a legendary hot-chicken house called Colombo's. When bridge demolition began at the base, Colombo's closed its doors. Without an heir to pass along his secret recipe, Bolton Polk fingered his namesake, nephew Bolton Matthews to keep tradition alive.

"It took me two weeks of good training before I got it right," 50-year-old Bolton Matthews says of his apprenticeship. When Polk felt the time was right, he turned his nephew loose with the recipe and three old cast-iron skillets that are still in use.

Today, Bolton Matthews fries his hot chickens at his own east Nashville restaurant, Bolton's Spicy Chicken and Fish on Main Street, a few blocks south of where the road bends into Gallatin Pike. I ask him about his marinade, then about the breading, but he's not talking.

Finally, he relents and gives me a peek at a large stainless steel bowl, swirling the contents, daring me to guess. The dark-red liquid shows stains of hot sauce, black pepper and other deep spices locked in a fiery dance. I quietly reach out a finger, risking raw chicken, but he snatches the bowl away without looking and gives it a quick rinse.

Bolton Matthews follows the tradition of Colombo's and the original Bar-B-Q Chicken Shack; there's only one degree of heat. "Some folks ask for me to make it hotter. I can tighten it up, if that's what they want, but some places make it so hot you can't enjoy it."

I ask him to "tighten up" a piece for me, and he asks the photographer and me to leave the kitchen. I plead with him to let me stay. I promise not to print what I see, but I get nowhere. Hot-chicken recipes are guarded. André Prince once barred a *Vogue* photographer from even stepping foot in her kitchen, and we were summarily told not to let our lens stray from the skillet.

Speaking of skillets, the pure purveyors of hot chicken still swear by cast iron to fry their spicy birds. Though André Prince admits in a moment of weakness that she might use a deep fryer for very large orders, she also admits that it doesn't taste the same as skillet-fried. That also means that hungry patrons can't arrive in a hurry. This is the original slow food, taking anywhere from 34 to 40 minutes to fry the pieces to perfection.

When British food writer Thomas Parker Bowles came to Nashville, it was Mayor Bill Purcell who took him to try hot chicken at Prince's Chicken Shack. The mayor likes to eat hot chicken at least once a week. I asked Prince if she had any other famous patrons.

"Oh yes, Fred Thompson came with Lorrie Morgan, when he was senator," she says with a wry smile. "And Little Richard likes to stop in when he's around, and then there was that quarterback, from Dallas, he came in here when he was dating Lorrie Morgan."

"Troy Aikman?" I prod. "Yes, that's it," she says, already prepared for my next question. "No, Lorrie doesn't stop in much these days, and no, I haven't tried her chicken."

Lorrie Morgan's chicken can be found at her Whites Creek restaurant Hotchickens.com, which she opened with her husband, singer Sammy Kershaw. Morgan grew up on hot chicken, thanks to her *Opry*-

star father George Morgan's penchant for seeking out the spicy stuff. Contrary to rumor, George Morgan never was made privy to Bolton Polk's original recipe.

"No way," Bolton Matthews says. "I'm the only one (Bolton Polk) ever told." Hotchickens.com claims that George Morgan, with the help of a chemist friend and a piece of Maude Prince's chicken, cobbled together his own recipe, which Lorrie uses today.

While Prince's, Bolton's and Hotchickens.com all trace their roots back to the same tree, a wild card opened this year out in Greenbrier. Owner Thomas Champion employs the three-heat mode at Emerial's Hot Chicken, though the levels hover well below what you'll find at other establishments. One can hope that it's only a harbinger of more hot-chicken shacks to dot the Middle Tennessee landscape.

Thankfully, André Prince has a daughter, Simone, who seems intent on carrying along the tradition. Bolton Matthews, on the other hand, has no heirs and seemed to question my heartfelt offer to be adopted.

A tear forms in his eye and takes leave, trailing down his cheek. I am touched. He motions to my pad of paper and says, "Make sure you wash your hands before you touch your face. Before you touch anything. Be sure to put that in your story."

Smokin' hot

If all this fuss about hot chicken has triggered a Pavlovian response, then you already have committed to heart the rules for eating fire. For you neophytes preparing to embark on a strange journey of pain and pleasure, here are some words to eat by.

- Prepare to wait, five to 10 minutes if they're not busy and have a batch in the skillet, or upwards of 45 minutes. It really does take at least half an hour to skillet-fry chicken right.
- Don't drink carbonated drinks. The fizz just kicks up the heat. Try lemonade or water, instead.
- If you think you want hot, start with medium. If you think you can handle medium (which at most places is plenty hot for the average diner), go for mild. If you want extra hot (called atomic at Hotchickens.com), have your head examined or go watch *Altered States*.
- Wash your hands well, with soap and water, before you touch any part of your body.
- Save the grease-stained white bread for end. The Japanese have a name for the taste beyond sweet, sour, salty, hot. They call it umami, and if they had hot chicken, they would surely call the bread at the end ichiban umami: the best, most satisfying taste of all.

The mayor of hot chicken

Mayor Bill Purcell is such a cheerleader of hot chicken, you can almost picture him with drumstick pompons and white bread epaulettes. Almost.

In fact, the mayor practically makes hot-chicken proprietary claims, something that might raise the hackles on a few Cajun fryers. "It originated here and remains a unique Nashville food," says the mayor, undaunted. "Hot chicken is ours."

It doesn't take much prodding to get Purcell to wax poetic on one of his favorite foods. Like a day trader in cayenne commodities, he has, through almost two terms, tracked the openings, closings and moves of every major player.

"I've tried to keep (hot chicken) a part of overall economic development activities," he says in his trademark understated fashion.

When asked what level of bite he prefers, the heat purist simply claims that, "The name says 'hot chicken,' that's what you should get," clearly eschewing the mild, medium or extra-hot.

The mayor also subscribes to the linear model of hot-chicken deconstruction. "I always eat from the top to the plate. If they wanted you to eat the bread first, they would have put it on top."

Which brings up a fine point. What do you do with the grease-stained pieces of white bread at the bottom of the plate? Purcell refers to that as the luxury part of the meal. So sublime is the flavor that the normally eloquent leader of Metro-Nashville finds himself at a loss for words. "It's not exactly like dessert."