

Dish Omaha – April 9th, 2025

Jeff: Here she is, KVNO's resident foodie, Diane Watson, for another edition of Dish Omaha. Good morning, Diane.

Diane: Good morning, Jeff. Hey, what takes you to Council Bluffs?

Jeff: Well, often the Pottawatomie Arts Culture Center.

Diane: Hoff Center.

Jeff: Hoff Center.

Diane: I love that place. Yes. I have been going lately for the food. That's what we're going to talk about today. Now, you would think that Council Bluffs developed kind of just the same way Omaha did, but not really. I'm sure you know it was originally called Kanesville. And the reason it was Kanesville is the Mormons who settled here in 1846 named it Kanesville before they left for Utah in 1852. But the railroad was a big part of Council Bluffs just like Omaha. And Council Bluffs was designated as the eastern terminus of the first transcontinental railroad.

Jeff: By Abraham Lincoln.

Diane: Yes, exactly. So U.P. played a major role in the economy and led to actually a proliferation of diners. There's a huge diner history and community in Council Bluffs. So, we're going to explore a little bit. Steak houses came in in the 20s. German and eastern European immigrants. And then the 50s and 60s saw a lot of drive-ins and soda fountains and more diners as car culture picked up. So, the locals really have pride in the local institutions. And I want to cover just a couple of them that you may or may not know about. Kristy Cream. Now, that's with a T, not a P. You're smiling. You know of Kristy Cream.

Jeff: Uh huh.

Diane: Started in 1954, selling local staples, burgers, fries, parfaits. Do you know what's in a parfait?

Jeff: Ice cream?

Diane: Yep, and?

Jeff: Chocolate?

Diane: It can be. Usually it's fruit and syrup.

Jeff: Oh, sure, sure.

Diane: Served up in a tall, narrow glass. So, they are one of the few that serves parfaits. They have three kinds of ice cream every day and 10 different kinds of sherbet. So, you can get one of the day. Some of their fun flavors are cherry, huckleberry, and watermelon.

Jeff: Nice.

Diane: Never had any of those. And it's a third-generation family restaurant. Tish's, been around since the 80s. We talked about those diners and ice cream, you know, type places. This was a seasonal window serving ice cream and sandwiches. And then in 1995, they moved into a full-service restaurant and bar, still owned by the same couple.

Jeff: Wow, wow.

Diane: Pizza King. Have you been to Pizza King?

Jeff: It's been a minute, but yes.

Diane: Okay, we need to go back. Pizza King started in 1965 in a kind of a club where the Midlands Mall was. And when it closed, they actually purchased St. Patrick's School on Broadway and opened up the Pizza King.

Jeff: Oh.

Diane: So, they're known, of course, for their pizza, but also their steaks, their prime rib. They will serve two pounds of Alaskan king crab legs in one order. And one of their special pizzas that I thought sounded really fun was the bullseye special, which has chicken, cream cheese, jalapeno peppers, and barbecue sauce.

Jeff: Mm, my.

Diane: Have you had cream cheese on pizza?

Jeff: No, I don't think I have.

Diane: It is life-changing.

Jeff: Is it?

Diane: Immediately, next time.

Jeff: Is it like sauerkraut on pizza, which I love?

Diane: Yes. I love it with pepperoni.

Jeff: Anything.

Diane: Yeah, agreed. And some of the other local favorites, the Quaker Steak and Lube, LPL's Restaurant and Bar, the Salty Dog, known for their wings, the Porch, and Legends, which used to be Duncan's Cafe.

Jeff: Oh, yeah.

Diane: Now, the whole dining scene changed in the 1990s. Can you guess why?

Jeff: Well, maybe something to do with the riverboat casinos.

Diane: Very good. Yeah, the legalized riverboat casinos really introduced both fine dining and buffet style. So, there's very fine steakhouses, the 360 at the top of Harrah's, which has an amazing view, Jack Binion's, you know, white tablecloths, the whole thing, 1853 at Ameristar. And one of the newest entries to our casino dining is Guy Fieri's. So, I've been to a couple of his restaurants and other places. I checked out the menu. Of course, it's big food, big calories, big flavor. The bacon mac and cheese burger has applewood smoked bacon, six cheese mac and cheese, lettuce, tomato, pickle, onion, and donkey sauce. Do you know what that is?

Jeff: I do not.

Diane: It's a fancy fun word for aioli, which is mayonnaise. Today, so we have classic steakhouses. We have some of these historic diners. And I just wanted to mention in a food scene, there's also its own farmer's market. They're in their 16th season out at Bayless Park. And they have a Facebook Council Bluffs Food Lovers group.

Jeff: Oh, yeah.

Diane: And also, I just want to tell you, we talk about Omaha having more restaurants per capita. According to my calculations, Council Bluffs has even more.

Jeff: I love it. Diane Watson, KVNO's resident foodie. Dish Omaha. Thanks a lot, Diane.