

STATELINE: Beloit area a place of taste

CLINT WOLF Editor

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BELOIT — There are many attractions that draw visitors to Beloit, but for many visitors one of the top reasons they come to the community is because they find it to be a place of many flavors.

Celestino Ruffini, executive director of Visit Beloit, said the dining options in the Beloit area is high on the list of attractions that keep drawing people back to the community.

“Every two years visitors are surveyed on what they like to do when they visit Beloit. Dining has either been No. 1 or No. 2,” Ruffini said. “Dining has really been our calling card.”

He said Beloit has a wide variety of dining and food options that can’t be found in most other communities, and about 57% of visitors surveyed say they came to Beloit because of the dining options.

And there are plenty of options to choose from. Of the 458 businesses promoted in the Stateline Area (Beloit, South Beloit and Rockton), 176 of them are restaurants.

“If you go home and you don’t want to cook, there is always somewhere to eat in the Beloit area,” Celestino said.

The area has a strong selection of supper clubs with long histories in the area including the 615 Club, the Butterfly and Benedetti's. There also are a variety of ethnic food choices, featuring Hispanic, Asian and Italian fare and more. Ruffini also pointed to a varied selection of food trucks offering unique taste treats.

Restaurants such as Lucy's No. 7 Burger Bar, Zen Sushi and Truk'd Taco make up a strong dining force in downtown Beloit. And for those who want to satisfy their sweet tooth, there are some favorite spots such as the Flying Pig and Northwoods Premium Confections which offer a selection of popcorn, chocolates and other treats.

"All of these businesses have payrolls. I think the amount of money spent on these operations is astounding. They are a powerful force in the local economy," Ruffini said.

Visit Beloit also has made exploring area restaurants and taverns a bit of an adventure. Through the Visit Beloit website, people can explore the Beloit & Beyond Cafe Trail, the Craft Beer Trail and the Taco Trail.

People who partake in the Cafe Trail, for example, can take a few days to visit the listed businesses on the site. Visitors may start out visiting Bagels & More and Blue Collar Coffee on the first day and move on to DeeDee's or the Blender Cafe on another day. They receive a Cafe Trail mug and they have a chance to register for a gift basket if they complete the trail. They also can list their favorite beverage they had and other things they liked about the experience. The Cafe Trail is in its third year and its popularity has been growing due to word-of-mouth references.

The businesses that are part of these trail listings promote the mini-adventures on their own Facebook pages and websites.

"A lot of these places become very creative by changing up menus or offer live music," Ruffini said.



Although dining establishments, and other businesses, had some challenging years during the pandemic, most of them are nearly back to normal, Ruffini said.

Visit Beloit gets most of its funding (70%) from hotel taxes. In 2022, the agency experienced a 22% increase in funding compared to 2021.

“Things have definitely made a turn for the better,” Ruffini said.

He said all indication are that the greater Beloit area is returning to pre-pandemic levels and visitor numbers are increasing. He noted ABC Supply Stadium has added a new vibrancy to the downtown area, and local businesses have benefited from the foot traffic that entertainment venue draws to the downtown.

Ruffini said the local restaurants not only are a driving force for tourism, but many of the local establishments have become his personal favorites. He has been at Visit Beloit since 2015 and he has become very familiar with many of the local dining establishments.

“When I travel for work or just for fun, I am spoiled when it comes to places to eat,” he said.

Clint Wolf