

Chef takes comfort breakfast to new level

Written by

AMY SOWDER
asowder@news-press.com

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Cynthia Patton eats almost daily at Survey Cafe, a charming eatery tucked within historic downtown Bonita Springs.

She raves to friends about the many different dishes at her special spot, especially the best seller at Sunday brunch: Survey's Not So French Toast for \$7.95.

"You know that saying 'It's to die for'? I say it's to kill for," said Patton, 50. "It's incredible. It's about the most addicting thing you can get for breakfast."

On a recent Sunday, head chef John Federici was sold out of his Not So French Toast by 1:30 p.m. He had almost 30 orders.

"We have customers who come on Sunday just for this," Federici said. "They don't even have to tell us what they want. We just put in their order."

Federici cooked up the idea for the Sunday brunch dish because he didn't want to sell day-old muffins and scones.

So he dries out the day's remaining

pastries before placing them in the freezer. By week's end, his freezer full of unused banana, blueberry and apple muffins and scones become the perfect main ingredient for bread pudding early Sunday morning.

"Every week it's going to taste different because it depends on what muffins we made that week," he said.

Federici tosses the diced pastries with a mixture of vanilla, cinnamon, heavy cream, sugar and egg yolks, baking it at 300 degrees until the custard is cooked through.

Each order gets three one-inch slices, dipped in traditional French toast batter with brown sugar, cinnamon and vanilla. It's toasted on the griddle and layered fan-like on a square white plate.

Federici then purees fresh strawberries and blueberries with water and vanilla, pouring it into a bowl. He sprinkles sliced strawberries and blueberries — "for texture," he said — in the sauce and

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drizzles it over the toast.

And even though the dish departs from the French style, it's gotta have a few shakes of powdered sugar and three dollops of whipped cream to top it off.

“With the berry sauce and whipped cream, no butter, no maple syrup necessary,” Patton said.

The dense, yet fluffy, texture is one of its best qualities, Federici said. But the taste gets ‘em every time too.

“People come back to the counter and tell me how wonderful it is,” cook Matt Hew said. Customers also change their orders when they see it being made and smell the fresh berry sauce scent wafting toward them.

“It has flavor within the bread because it's not just white bread,” Federici said. “Everybody oohs and aahs when you take it out.”

ABOUT THE RESTAURANT

- Restaurant: Survey Cafe
- Cuisine: Southern food with a gourmet flair
- Location: 10530 Wilson St., behind Benson's Grocery on Old 41 Road in downtown Bonita Springs
- Hours: 7:30 a.m.-3 p.m. daily; 5-9 p.m. Friday and Saturday (Nov.-April)
- Did you know?: The restaurant is owned by Bonita Springs Mayor Ben Nelson and his wife, Lori
- Also: Fresh baked goods daily, gourmet coffee, free WiFi, inside seating and outside deck seating
- More information: Call 992-2233 or visit thesurveycafe.com

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