



COUNTRY CAFÉ OF HOT SPRINGS

I always enjoy reading emails I receive from *Cooperative Living* readers about their favorite restaurants. I am constantly looking for restaurants to try, and emails from readers generally point me in the right direction.

One such restaurant is the Country Café outside of Hot Springs, Virginia. I recently was able to try it on two different occasions. My first visit was unannounced and I arrived around 1:30 p.m. I thought this time of day would be past the busy lunch hour.

Much to my surprise, the restaurant was full, with every table taken and people waiting at the door. This can be a favorable sign that a particular eatery is a good choice; it can also suggest the service might be slow. Much to my delight, Mary, our waitress, assured me the service would be fast and friendly, which it was.

At this point in my personal review process, the Country Café has two favorable stars: a strong recommendation from a *Cooperative Living* reader and good service. The next test is, naturally, the most important: How tasty is the food?

We were a table of four and ordered a chicken wrap, a BLT grilled cheese

sandwich, chicken strips and a lunch platter of fried catfish. You may remember from past articles that part of the **Dining with Dan** experience is sharing each entrée. There were thumbs up around the table with each choice.

Often the restaurant setting can add or detract from the overall dining experience. The view from the front of this restaurant could not be more pastoral and pleasing. Looking out the window from our table we saw a lush hillside with deer feeding in the distance. After lunch that day, I had a strong feeling that Country Café would be a good candidate for more research, and then, maybe, a **Dining with Dan** article.

As the days went by, I could not stop thinking about the Country Café. So, I found myself arranging a return trip to experience dinner. Often, a dinner menu is more complex than lunch and requires different culinary and organizational skills.

On my return visit, I met with David and Wanda Bradley, the owners and managers, and definitely the heart and soul of the Country Café. David and Wanda, who were actually married in the restaurant, met and raised their family in Hot Springs.

Wanda said, "We have been a part of this community for a very long time; the people we serve are our friends and neighbors." David added, "Our menu is a collection of their favorites. For example, the Southwest Chicken item has been on the menu for over 22 years."

Menu categories include Country Classics, House Specialties, Steaks, Pasta, Seafood, Sandwiches and, of course, Appetizers. My dinner companion and I started with an appetizer of potato skins heaped with cheese, bacon and green onions.

I usually expect my dining companion to select a beef or pork entrée so I can try one of the more imaginative dishes. Well, she had a different idea and ordered the



Wanda and David Bradley, the owners of the Country Café.

grilled salmon. As it turned out, she made an excellent choice. It was moist and had a delicious flavor.

I ordered Trout Parmesan, one of Wanda's recommendations. Fresh, mountain trout is a popular local selection and certainly a favorite of mine. The trout was broiled and covered with fresh, grated Parmesan cheese, black pepper and garlic. The combination of the fresh, mild taste of the trout and the sharp flavor of the Parmesan pleased my palate.

We topped off the meal with a take-out order: slices of key lime pie and chocolate cream pie for the road.

The combined breakfast, lunch and dinner menu at the Country Café has over 50 different items. With that many choices, expecting each to be a winner is a lot to ask of any restaurant. However, after trying a variety of six flavorful dishes over two different dining experiences, I believe the odds for a great meal are in your favor.

When I find a restaurant that "gets it right," I feel rewarded. Also, I cannot end this article without telling you of a pleasant observation ... everyone we saw at work seemed happy, no matter what their responsibility. And that rubs off on the guests!

I want to thank David and Wanda for my delightful dining experiences, and *Cooperative Living* readers, Susan and Fred Webb, for recommending Country Café. ■





From left: Mary was our server for lunch. Chef Andre prepares over 50 different entrees. Nora was our server for dinner. Above is the beautiful view outside the Country Café.



The Country Café has been a staple in Hot Springs for more than 20 years. Some of the tasty foods we tried were an appetizer of loaded potato skins, grilled salmon, crispy onion rings, broiled Trout Parmesan and key lime pie.

