

Motor City mornings: 21 great breakfast places to start your day

BY SYLVIA RECTOR

FREE PRESS FOOD WRITER

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Rise and shine!

The weather's finally warm and the sun's peeking through the blinds, so don't just lie there, for goodness' sake. Hop out of bed and go eat.

Who doesn't love breakfast, especially when someone else is cooking it? So we went in search of metro Detroit's best and best-beloved breakfast restaurants.

We ate at swanky hotels and divey diners, at chic cafes and mom-and-pop Coneys. We sampled the bacon and the Benedicts, the hotcakes and the hash browns, the coffeecake and the cappuccino.

And now we've turned our findings into a section filled with great ways to start your day -- a scramble of new spots and old favorites, chosen to fit every budget, taste and occasion. We also feature recipes you'll love.

It's a celebration of breakfast, so grab the paper, jump in the car and start your day off right.

GO FOR THE FOOD

BEVERLY HILLS GRILL, Beverly Hills

If there's a so-called destination breakfast place in metro Detroit, the Beverly Hills Grill is surely it. People come for signature dishes like the jumbo lump crab cakes Benedict and the Bananas Foster French toast. They come for the veteran wait staff's attentive service. And they come because it's civilized, stylish and -- given its reputation -- even affordable.

Chalkboards list the daily specials, including scrambles and omelets known for their creative blends of deluxe ingredients. Typical is the lobster Cobb omelet with smoked bacon, avocado, tomatoes, onion and blue cheese, priced at \$10. Count on deliciously fresh O.J., English muffins by Wolferman's and quality coffee, continuously refilled.

BREAKFAST PRICE KEY

\$ Inexpensive; \$8 and under.

\$\$ Moderate; \$8-\$14.

\$\$\$ Expensive; \$14-\$20.

\$\$\$\$ Very expensive; \$20 and up.

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WIN BREAKFAST WITH SYLVIA

If your favorite breakfast spot didn't make the Free Press

On weekends, there's often a wait, so people put their names on the list and go across the street to browse at Borders. It's a Birmingham ritual.

31471 Southfield Road, north of Thirteen Mile, Beverly Hills. 248-642-2355. Open 6 a.m.-11 p.m. Monday-Thursday, 6 a.m.-midnight Friday, 8 a.m.-midnight Saturday, 8 a.m.-10 p.m. Sunday; breakfast menu available 7-11 a.m. Monday-Friday, brunch menu 8 a.m.-4 p.m. Saturday-Sunday. \$\$.

THE FLY TRAP, Ferndale

If you can manage to get over the name and just sit down with the menu, you'll be fine. Seattle-trained chef-owner Gavin McMillian, who put Fiddleheads in Royal Oak on the map a couple of years ago, has created a rockin' morning menu for this bright new 40-seat "finer diner," as the sign calls it. Ingredients are robust, and the flavors are anything but shy.

Try the Forager omelet with grilled mushrooms, herbs, onion and smoked gouda; or an Italian-inspired version featuring spicy sausage, roasted peppers, spinach and provolone; or a pair of crab cakes with eggs, served with a green chili tartar. If you must, you can also have plain old "eggs a la boring," with or without meat; most entrees come with smashed garlic fried potatoes and toast.

Grab a booth or sit at the counter; service is friendly and fast. Daily specials and many vegetarian and vegan options.

22950 Woodward, Ferndale. 248-399-5150 and www.theflytrapferndale.com. Open 7:30 a.m.-10 p.m. Tuesday-Sunday; breakfast items until 5 p.m. \$\$.

FRITTATA, Clawson

There's no mystery about the signature dish here: It's the frittata, the open-faced omelets that chef Jerald Widman creates with boldly flavored ingredients such as Asiago cheese, roasted wild mushrooms, Italian pancetta and more.

Make up your own combo or choose one of his; the prosciutto-and-olive version is terrific.

Other recommended dishes are the eggs Benedict and the mascarpone-stuffed French toast with fruit.

Entrees are mostly in the \$7-\$9 range, but side items including toast and potatoes are priced separately.

Both the creative, well-crafted food and the funky, upbeat dÈcor give Frittata a contemporary feeling that sets it apart from more middle-of-the-road venues. The dining room is miniscule, so there may be a wait, especially on weekends. Look for tables outdoors this spring.

236 S. Main, Clawson. 248-280-2552. Open 7:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m. Tuesday-Sunday; breakfast anytime. Closed Monday. \$\$\$.

list, tell us its name and address and why you think other people would love it as much as you do. Restaurant critic Sylvia Rector and a photographer may meet you there for breakfast -- our treat!

Convince us it's a breakfast gem, and it and you could be featured in a follow-up article, along with excerpts of letters from many other readers. Sorry, but weekend buffet places won't be considered, and restaurant employees, owners and their families are prohibited from participating.

Sylvia will select three readers as breakfast buddies and pass along recommendations from as many others as possible in an upcoming issue of FOOD.

Be sure to tell us your full name and city and include a daytime phone number so we can contact you.

Write to: **Breakfast With Sylvia,**

Features Department,
Detroit Free Press,
600 W. Fort St., Detroit
48226, or e-mail
food@freepress.com.
Submissions should
arrive by Monday, April
18.

RECIPES, Troy

This very pleasant breakfast-and-lunch restaurant on Crooks near the Somerset Collection is especially appealing for its myriad kinds of egg dishes -- Benedicts, omelets, skilletts, scrambles, frittatas and more, appealingly priced in the \$6-\$8 range, including grilled spuds and toast. Ingredients are noticeably fresh and are offered in seemingly endless combinations. Frequent flavor themes include Southwestern, country, vegetarian and seafood.

Besides egg dishes, there are five kinds of pancakes, hot cereals, biscuits and some very fine French toast.

Located just down the street from so much shopping, this is a good place for friends to meet and plot their assault on the stores. Reservations are accepted.

2919 Crooks, south of Big Beaver, Troy. 248-614-5390. Open 7 a.m.-2:30 p.m. Monday-Friday, 7 a.m.-3 p.m. Saturday-Sunday; breakfast anytime. Reservations accepted. \$\$.

TOAST, Ferndale

Toast's fans pack the restaurant's small rear foyer most weekend mornings, waiting for one of the 45 seats to open so they can order overstuffed omelets, big egg plates and grill specials that range from Grand Marnier French toast to huevos rancheros.

Omelets are an especially good choice on this wide-ranging menu. Try the smoked bacon-and-gouda with tomato, onions and herbs, or the rich ham-and-brie with roasted red peppers and basil.

Toast options include wheat, marble rye, challah and cinnamon challah.

Cool and casual ambiance and service.

Hooray for the oversized coffee cups, which help keep us well-caffeinated.

23144 N. Woodward, Ferndale. 248-398-0444. Open 7 a.m.-3 p.m. Monday-Friday, 8 a.m.-3 p.m. Saturday-Sunday; breakfast anytime. \$\$.

ORIGINAL PANCAKE HOUSE, Grosse Pointe Woods

The national Original Pancake House chain has three locations in metro Detroit, but this was the first, and many would say it's still the best. The staff is warm and friendly, and the dining room has an old-shoe comfiness that's just right for mornings.

Make no mistake, though: The real draw is the made-from-scratch food. Excellent coffee. Fresh-squeezed grapefruit and orange juice. House-recipe sausage.

Regulars argue about what's best here, but favorites include the puffy, oven-baked, filled pancakes (the Dutch Baby, Garden Dutch Baby and Big German), and the extra-fluffy omelets.

The dining room seats about 100, but there's often a line at the door, especially on weekends. Go ahead and park; it moves fast.

20273 Mack, south of Vernier, Grosse Pointe Woods. 313-884-4144. Open 6:30 a.m. -9 p.m. daily; breakfast anytime. \$\$.

SPLURGE

BROOKSHIRE, Royal Park Hotel, Rochester

The airy, light-filled Gallery area of the Royal Park Hotel's Brookshire restaurant might be metro Detroit's most beautiful setting for breakfast -- as well as its best-kept secret. The marble floors gleam, plants bloom in pots on linen-covered tables and expansive windows overlook a flagstone veranda and Paint Creek. The Italian-roasted Mokarabia coffee, served from a graceful silver pot, is superb, and so is chef Gerald Gramzay's weekday menu. We recommend the Breakfast Griddle Tasting Trio, small versions of three featured entrees: Belgian waffles with whipped cream and berries, sweet potato pancakes with spiced apple compote and luscious raisin-studded French Toast Kugelhopf. Or try the sophisticated but sassy Benedicts Santa Fe, made with spicy chorizo sausage, avocado salsa and chipotle-laced hollandaise sauce. Note the menu's European touches, from Irish oatmeal to the Lord of the Manor breakfast of eggs, lamb chops, grilled tenderloin, sausage, roasted tomatoes and fried potatoes for \$26.

Plates arrive on carts, classical music plays, and no one hurries you. When weather permits, dining can be enjoyed on the veranda. Some of the weekday dishes are not offered Saturday and Sunday, when the menu combines breakfast and lunch items. Prices reflect the sublime setting and service.

600 E. University, downtown Rochester. 248-453-8732. Breakfast served 6:30-10:30 a.m. Monday-Friday; brunch menu 10:30 a.m. -2:30 p.m. Saturday-Sunday. \$\$\$\$.

RUGBY GRILL, Townsend Hotel, Birmingham

The handsome, richly appointed Rugby Grill leads the list of power breakfast spots in the tony Birmingham-Bloomfield-Troy area. But it's also an elegant choice for more personal occasions -- Mom's birthday, perhaps, or celebrating your best friend's promotion.

Health-conscious choices include lavender honey-glazed grapefruit segments with sun-dried Michigan cherries, and Swiss Bircher muesli with nuts and seasonal berries.

If calories aren't a concern, succumb to indulgences such as the glorious Belgian waffle with fresh strawberries, Vermont maple syrup and cinnamon-swirled butter -- served with a side of sweet whipped cream.

With its exclusive cachet and exceptional service, breakfast at the Townsend is an occasion in its own right, but be prepared for the bill: The honeyed grapefruit, for example, is \$9; the waffle, \$12. The lavish multicourse Townsend Breakfast is \$27.

100 Townsend St., Birmingham. 248-642-7900. Breakfast served 6:30-11 a.m. daily. \$\$\$\$.

THE GRILL, Ritz-Carlton, Dearborn

Weekday mornings, the aristocratic Ritz-Carlton Grill is populated with business travelers, auto-industry executives and other professionals having early morning meetings at the Grill's spacious, linen-draped tables -- proof that business and pleasure *can* mix.

Service is professional and attentive, and the menu offers all you'd expect, from a berry-topped Belgian waffle and a house-smoked salmon plate to classic eggs Benedict.

But there's also a small, high-quality breakfast buffet, even on weekdays, whose \$19 price is a good buy, compared to a la carte ordering. Besides hot scrambled eggs, potatoes and breakfast meats, it offers cold meats and cheeses, pastries, cereals, beautiful fresh fruit and berries, as well as your very own pot of Jamaican Blue Mountain coffee and your choice of fresh-squeezed juice.

300 Town Center Drive, Dearborn. 313-441-2000. A la carte breakfast served 6:30-11 a.m. Monday-Friday; buffet 6:30-10 a.m. Monday-Friday and 8-10 a.m. Saturday-Sunday. \$\$\$\$.

SOMETHING DIFFERENT

PASTRIES BY ELLEN, Sylvan Lake

It looks like a nice little bakery and pastry shop -- and it is -- in a strip mall on Orchard Lake Road, but step inside and you'll discover that Pastries by Ellen is a wonderful little gem of a restaurant, too, with seating for about 30 customers. Chef George Kalergis, husband of pastry chef Ellen Meyer-Kalergis, serves up everything from housemade granola parfait with yogurt and berries to a wide array of first-rate egg dishes.

Green Eggs & Ham may show up on other menus, but this version is inspired: fluffy scrambled eggs cooked with just the right amount of basil pesto, diced fresh tomatoes and sweet onions, served with sides of ham, home fries and toast.

Among the regular omelets, the Southwestern loaded with bacon, salsa, scallions, Pepper Jack cheese, avocado and sour cream is popular, but the creative daily specials are hard to pass up.

Don't miss the great-tasting toast, made with George's excellent breads. Ellen makes all the Danish, croissant and cinnamon-roll doughs from scratch, and most customers end up choosing something from the bakery case before they leave.

When you arrive, look for a menu at the cash register and order there; they'll bring your food to your table. Coffee is self-serve. This is a friendly, low-key place and so are its prices. The chefs met while attending the Culinary Institute of America, and their skills show in everything they make.

2495 Orchard Lake Road, west of Middlebelt, Sylvan Lake. 248-681-5700 and www.pastriesbyellen.com. Open 6 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday-Friday, 8 a.m.-4 p.m. Saturday; breakfast available until 11 a.m. weekdays, noon Saturday. \$.

NEW CENTER EATERY, Detroit

Deep-fried chicken wings and waffles for breakfast? It may sound strange, but folks in L.A. are simply wild about the combination, immortalized there by the Roscoe's Chicken and Waffles restaurant chain.

To try a local version of this West Coast delicacy, head to the New Center Eatery, a stylish, casual café that opened two years ago across West Grand from the Hotel St. Regis. The three or four wings are deep-fried to crunchy-golden crispness before being set atop a crisp-tender waffle and garnished with a scoop of butter and a fresh strawberry. Hot maple syrup is served in a pitcher on the side. The whole thing goes for \$6.95.

How do you eat it? Take a bite of one of the crunchy, fried wings and then a forkful of warm, syrup-drenched baked waffle. Don't worry; you'll figure it out.

Other breakfast options here include grilled salmon, omelets, the usual meat-and-eggs, waffles, French toast and pancakes.

The dining room is pretty and fresh flowers decorate the tables; plates and cutlery are disposable plastic.

3100 W. Grand, Detroit. 313-875-0088 and www.newcentereatery.com. Open 7:30 a.m. -5 p.m. Monday-Friday, 8 a.m.-4 p.m. Saturday, 7:30 a.m. -5 p.m. Sunday; breakfast is served all day. \$-\$\$.

CAFÉ HABANA, Royal Oak

There's no hint from the outside that the casual, Cuban-inspired Café Habana serves breakfast; indeed, it's easy to miss the place entirely, tucked away on a side street in downtown Royal Oak.

Be sure to have the breakfast arepas: bright yellow cornmeal pancakes right off the griddle, sandwiching a filling of cool cream cheese and a gloriously red fruit salsa made with fresh strawberries, raspberries, pineapple and mango. More fruit is piled on top and it's all sprinkled with powdered sugar. It's \$6 and a great dish -- cool, warm, creamy, crisp, and fresh-fresh-fresh. Add a side of extra-strong, sweetened Café Cubano coffee and you're good to go.

Other Cuban and Latin-influenced breakfast dishes, none more than \$7, include omelets and other egg dishes such as huevos rancheros. Bright colors, photographs of Cuba, and the exposed brick walls of a historic building blend into a fun, funky interior. Friendly wait staff and line cooks.

109 E. Fifth near South Main, Royal Oak. 248-544-6255. 8 a.m. -11 p.m. Sunday-Thursday; 8 a.m. -midnight Friday-Saturday. Breakfast dishes available anytime. \$\$.

EL RANCHO, Detroit

You love Mexican food for lunch and dinner, so why not start your day with it? Mexican Town's family-owned El Rancho serves up big breakfast platters for bargain prices all day long.

If you want to venture beyond the familiar huevos rancheros, we'd suggest the tasty and very popular *machacado* -- scrambled eggs with chopped dried beef, diced tomatoes, green peppers, onions and cheese.

Another favorite is the chilaquiles, scrambled eggs with pieces of corn tortillas, tomatoes, green peppers, onions and cheese. Platters come with rice, beans and tortillas, and you'll get a basket of chips and two sauces, even at breakfast.

Founded in 1983, El Rancho was renovated and almost tripled in size two years ago. Its attractive, yellow-walled dining room with sombreros and scarves decorating the windows now holds 165. The staff is friendly and there's a guest parking lot behind the building.

5900 W. Vernor, east of Livernois, Detroit. 313-843-2151 and www.elranchomexrest.com. 8 a.m. -11 p.m. Sunday-Thursday, 8 a.m.-4 a.m. Friday-Saturday. \$-\$\$.

Hot off the griddle

FARMER'S RESTAURANT, Detroit

This family-owned gem at the corner of Market and Adelaide in Detroit's Eastern Market opens at 5 a.m. Monday through Saturday and has been serving hearty, down-home food for 30 years, come November. The clientele is a democratic mix of cops, farmers, merchants, suits, truckers and local folks who come for the really big platters of eggs, breakfast meats and potatoes or grits. The kitchen staff is so dedicated to scratch cooking, they roast their hams on the bone, boil and slice the corned beef in house and make their own excellent sausage from a recipe developed by founder Gerry Fermanis.

Splurge on the Farmer's Special: ham, bacon, sausage, two eggs any style, grits or hash browns, and toast, all for \$5.25. Coffee's a buck. Service is friendly and fast. Be sure to check out the charming, wall-size farm painting on the dining room wall.

2542 Market St., Detroit. 313-259-8230. 5 a.m.-2:30 p.m. Monday-Friday, 5 a.m.-4 p.m. Saturday, closed Sunday; breakfast anytime. \$. No credit cards.

ORANGE PEEL, Sterling Heights

There's often a line at the 46-seat Orange Peel in Sterling Heights, one of those little word-of-mouth, hole-in-the-wall spots you'd probably never visit if someone didn't tell you about it.

The huge breakfast menu offers 40 kinds of three-egg omelets, all of which look like they must have at least five eggs because owner-and-grill-cook Rich Stefanovich is so generous with the fillings. Most are \$6.25 or less and include toast and a giant serving of American fried potatoes -- boiled, peeled, shredded and grilled in house.

The pancakes are scratch-made, too. You can get half-orders of most stuff, which I'd advise.

Note the classic wall clock with orange-painted golf balls for numbers; Stefanovich and his dad made it when the Orange Peel opened 16 years ago. The waitresses are great at this Macomb County favorite. On the down side, it's hard to avoid smokers in the small room.

13408 Fifteen Mile at Schoenherr, Sterling Heights. 586-795-9912. 6 a.m.-10 p.m. daily. \$. No credit cards.

RUSSELL STREET DELI, Detroit

The problem with the Russell Street Deli is that it does breakfast only one day a week, Saturday, but despite that it has an avid following among shoppers who flock into Eastern Market that day to shop for produce.

Every Saturday brings a different set of special egg dishes; salmon scramble with plum tomatoes, dill and green onions is typical.

The regular menu has lots to offer, too, including pancakes, French toast and a tasty vegetarian hash.

You'll have to wait in line and probably end up sharing your table with strangers, but regulars say that's

part of the appeal here. (Weekdays, Russell Street's menu offers salads, sandwiches and other lunch fare.)

2465 Russell in Eastern Market, Detroit. 313-567-2900. Open 8 a.m.-2:30 p.m. Saturday for breakfast. \$\$. No credit cards.

DIMITRI'S BROTHERS, Farmington

Ask folks in Farmington where to go for a tasty, affordable breakfast and chances are good you'll end up at Dimitri's Brothers, in business there for 20 years. The big omelets are made with four extra-large eggs, says owner and chef Bill Dimitri. Served with well-browned home fries and toast, most are less than \$5.

Regulars recommend the blueberry pancakes, with loads of berries cooked right in. One thing you're almost sure to encounter is friendly, attentive service at this popular hometown spot.

33200 Grand River, downtown Farmington. 248-474-2500. Open 6 a.m.-9 p.m. Monday-Saturday, 7 a.m.-9 p.m. Sunday. \$.

JANET'S LUNCH, Grosse Pointe Park

It's really history and tradition that make Janet's Lunch so beloved in the Grosse Pointes. Its old-time horseshoe-shaped lunch counter has 27 stools, and you'll find them occupied by people of all ages and from all walks and stations of life. Set at the corner of Kercheval and Wayburn, the restaurant opened in 1939 and still serves breakfast and lunch without fuss at a good price.

People love the eggs, hash browns and toast, the bacon cooked correctly crisp, and the absolutely ethereal pancakes. Order the raspberry ones; you can't find those just anywhere.

15033 Kercheval at Wayburn, Grosse Pointe Park. 313-331-5776. Open 6 a.m.-3 p.m. Monday-Friday, 6 a.m.-2 p.m. Saturday, 8 a.m.-2 p.m. Sunday. \$. No credit cards.

THE CLIQUE, Detroit

The Clique, on East Jefferson a mile from the Renaissance Center, doesn't look like a power-breakfast destination, but you might be surprised. It's one of Detroit's best-known breakfast meeting spots, attracting everyone from business executives to day laborers. The Clique's a Dee-troit place, for sure. You know the menu: eggs, meats, hash browns or grits, hotcakes and the other usual fare, plus extras like biscuits and gravy.

Opened in 1968, the restaurant has lunch-counter seating, plus booths in a greenhouse-style section that was added in front. Service is friendly and parking is free in the adjacent lot.

1326 E. Jefferson, Detroit. 313-259-0922. Open 6 a.m.-3 p.m. Monday-Friday, 7 a.m.-3 p.m. Saturday-Sunday; breakfast anytime. \$.

WHISTLE STOP, Birmingham

Birmingham-area breakfast lovers half-expect to run into someone they know when they go to the

Whistle Stop. Families and young professionals, tribes of teenagers and retired couples all stand in line for a seat at this old-favorite eatery best known for its big breakfast plates.

Omelets and eggs are always a good choice here, and the pancakes are terrific. But the most amazing thing on the menu is the Bananas Foster Cinnamon Roll French Toast -- cinnamon roll slices dipped in eggnog batter and grilled, to be topped by sliced bananas, whipped cream, pecans and rum sauce.

The waitresses keep your coffee cup filled and bring the food when it's piping hot.

501 S. Eton, east of Maple, Birmingham. 248-647-5588. Open 7 a.m.-8 p.m. Monday-Friday, 7 a.m.-3 p.m. Saturday-Sunday; breakfast anytime. \$\$.

KATE'S KITCHEN, Flat Rock

Downriver, folks line up for a seat at Kate's Kitchen, a small café in Flat Rock famous for its deep-dish homemade pies and bountiful, country-style breakfasts. The fluffy biscuits and the homemade sausage gravy would do your grandmother proud, and the pancakes are divine.

The restaurant has just eight booths and six tables, so it may take a little while to get seated. But that gives you time to figure out what kind of pie you want to buy as you leave.

26558 W. Huron River Dr., west of Telegraph, Flat Rock. 734-782-3909. 6 a.m.-2 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday, 7 a.m.-2 p.m. Sunday. \$.

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