

DINING

Owner Ben Stephens recently showed off the Jenna, one of five Eggs Benedict-style dishes proudly served at The Pantry in Green Mountain Falls. The dish was created by chef Chad Peterson, back left. The restaurant has a long history in the small mountain town.



BRYAN OLLER,
THE GAZETTE

TOAST OF THE TOWN

BY NATHANIEL GLEN
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The last thing you want to do as a critic is tarnish your favorite gem by making it too popular.

Will praise and notoriety change The Pantry?

Will the cheery waitresses who call regulars "hon" begin to look haggard and forlorn once crowds overrun the place?

Not likely. It's too late for that.

This classic diner in Green Mountain Falls is already so popular that on weekends, disciples come from miles around to wait in the icy mountain air on the sidewalk for a breakfast table.

In summer, the seating spills out into a back garden and sunny tables on the sidewalk.

The delights that draw them are many, but they start with the French toast.

Here, French toast (\$9) begins with a homemade cinnamon roll, butterflied, bathed in egg,



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then slapped on the grill. The finished product is light and airy inside, crisp and decadent outside, and one of the most popular things on the menu.

The other breakfast plates that vie for supremacy are the fresh-baked cinnamon-raisin bread (which often comes as a side) and a family of five variations on the theme of classic Eggs Benedict (\$8.50-\$9).

The food comes from a tiny kitchen behind a vintage lunch

counter where the diner has been serving Green Mountain Falls for about 60 years. The Pantry started out as T's Pantry, back when the main road up Ute Pass ran through the middle of town, and it has kept the Pantry moniker ever since.

Inside the constantly slamming old screen door, a J-shaped counter, lined with stools, is crowded with salt and pepper, hot sauce, bowls of half-and-

details

THE PANTRY

★★★★

(Popular for a reason)

Address: 6980

Lake St., Green

Mountain Falls

Phone: 684-9018

Hours: 7 a.m.-

2:30 p.m. daily

dinner 4:30 p.m.-

8:30 p.m. Thurs-

days through

Saturdays

Entrees: \$6-\$11

Vegetarian:

Plenty of salads

Alcohol: No

Credit cards: Yes

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PANTRY: Only syrup and crowds might mar visit to Green Mountain Falls diner

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half, folded newspapers and all the other accoutrements that should accompany diner food.

The shelves behind the counter overflow with old photos, trophies, Gumby dolls, bobbleheads of Avalanche goalie Patrick Roy, and all the other clutter a locally-owned restaurant accumulates over the decades. Beyond the counter, the staff tries to juggle weekend crowds in the dining room.

If you come for breakfast on a Saturday or Sunday, expect to wait. Do not try to bring a big party. In fact, avoid peak times altogether, if you can.

But, if you have to wait, know it is worth it. The breads and cakes are all made from scratch. As is almost everything else. "I'm making the mashed potatoes right now," said Ben Stephens, the owner, when I called recently.

My favorite way to enjoy The Pantry is to hit it at odd times: breakfast at 2 p.m. or 10 a.m. on a weekday — anytime I happen to be driving past, and not in too much of a hurry to dig into a plate of Eggs Benedict.

The best is the Baby Doe (\$9) - Benedict with bacon and avocado, a splash of hot sauce from the counter and hash

browns to soak up the aftermath of yoke and spice. Everything from the kitchen comes out perfect. The bacon is both crispy and chewy, the eggs run golden rich in the center.

The service never misses a beat, even when the crowds are frantic.

Lunch is great, too. The chicken noodle soup (\$5) is freshly made, with lots of flavor from carrots, celery and generous chunks of chicken.

The half-pound-plus burgers are almost too big to eat. The green chili burger (\$9) is almost completely hidden by chunky, mild green chili with bold amounts of cumin and other spices that make it taste almost like a Texas chili. A knife and fork — and perhaps even a spoon — are recommended.

For light eaters, the diner also serves decent salads.

The only downside is the diner's choice of syrup. It is, of course, of the thick, fake variety. That's the norm around here and I suppose most diners expect and even prefer the stuff to real maple sap, but The Pantry's version is especially artificial-tasting.

It is a good way to ruin the otherwise fabulous cinnamon roll French toast. Fortunately, the toast is so sweet anyway that it is best enjoyed unadorned.