

Cuisine of the CAPSTONE

BY CAROLINE GAZZARA-MCKENZIE PHOTOS BY CARY NORTON

When most people think of their college years, they remember their friends, the campus, their classes—

and more often than not—the food. College town grub is not usually the most high brow of delicacies, but instead the kind of cheesy, fried or sweet tooth foods that fill the stomach and nourish the soul. It is the kind of cuisine that makes us reminisce about a time gone by—what we ate, who we were with and how things used to be.

Many of Tuscaloosa's campus restaurants of yesteryear have come and gone—but not all. There are certain establishments—and certain iconic dishes (and drinks, of course) that seem to be constants.

When it comes to food, nothing beats Tuscaloosa. Here, we feature six dishes and one drink that are synonymous with UA. Because when you are coming "home," you must have cuisine of the Capstone.

A TRIP DOWN MEMORY LANE

Tucked behind Bryant-Denny Stadium is Rama Jama's, home of the national championship burger and BLT sandwich. Decked out with 17 strips of bacon on the BLT and 17 ounces of meat for the burger, the national championship sandwiches aren't just trophies for the iconic restaurant. With every national championship win, the team at Rama Jama's adds another hearty slice of bacon or meaty ounce to its signature item.

Founded in 1996 by former owner and current chef Gary Lewis, Rama Jama's is the hotspot for quintessential game day food. Popular not just with alumni and Tuscaloosa residents, it's also a favorite of students. Michael Hebron, who bought Rama Jama's in 2017, said it's not just the burgers that attract so many customers, but also the breakfast, milkshakes and other treats.

"We're known all over the world for our hamburgers," Hebron said. "There are two special things on the menu that probably get us the most national TV time every year—the national championship burger and the national championship BLT. As our patrons tell us, you can never go wrong because we serve the best breakfast in Tuscaloosa. You cannot go wrong with breakfast."

Rama Jama's Championship Burger

17 ounces of 80 percent lean, 20 percent fat ground beef

5-inch hamburger bun lettuce tomato onion pickle chips 2 strips thick-cut bacon one fried onion ring dill pickle spear



Form two equal-sized patties of lean ground beef and put on the grill until cooked to your liking. Once done, place both patties on a 5-inch bun and top with lettuce, tomato, onion, pickle and two strips of thick-cut bacon. Place top of bun on the burger, and crown with one fried onion ring and a dill pickle spear.





ICONIC WINGS

Originally known as Wings and Things, Buffalo Phil's is one of the most iconic restaurants in title town. The signature crispy buffalo wings with curly fries and a side of sliced celery and carrots have been around since founded 1981 by Phillip Weaver and then-partner Bob Baumhower.

Slathered in the famous secret recipe hot sauce, the wings are a hit for students, locals and alumni. Former Alabama football player Derrick Henry loved B-Phils so much that general manager Christian Pierce still remembers his order of honey barbecue wings or an American club sandwich.

"We're pretty famous for our wings," Pierce said. "We're much different when it comes to our competitors. They have the bigger, jumbo kind of wings but with us, we're really proud of the wings we have. They're smaller wings but since they're smaller, they're more crispy and more flavorful. The customer can really enjoy the flavor from the chicken as well as the hot sauce."

Chef Cynthia "Red" Nox said wings are the staple at Buffalo Phil's. On average, 25 to 35 40-pound cases of wings are ordered three times a week to keep up with demand. On game days or during big events on campus, more wings are ordered.



Quick Grill, located across from Buffalo Phil's. Originally founded in the late '90s, Quick Grill is a staple on the Strip.

The late night Mediterranean spot is famous for its messy fries. Topped with chili, seasoning salt and shredded cheese with a side of ranch, the fries are essential to living in Tuscaloosa.

Manager Zak Alwan and his family purchased Quick Grill in 2008, and have since renovated the small restaurant and made the hours more accessible for locals.

"It's been quite a journey to say the least," Alwan said. "The previous owner would only ever open on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays from about midnight till around 3 a.m. or so. That means Quick Grill wasn't even open during the week-it was honestly hardly open at all."

Seeing the bigger picture, Alwan said his dad opened the restaurant six days a week and expanded the hours from 6 p.m. to 3 a.m. With time, the outside of the tiny restaurant was repainted and renovated. Business started coming in little by little, Alwan

"Our key goal was speed, because we had to live up to the name Quick Grill," he added. "Now if you come to order food and you're afraid of the huge line, worry not, because you get served right at the window when you order! How's that for quick?"

LEGENDARY BBQ

Originally founded in Tuscaloosa, Dreamland Bar-B-Que is possibly the most popular barbecue in Alabama. After expanding to more than just ribs and bread, Dreamland now has an entire menu of barbecue goodness. Most notable on its menu are the stadium nachos, a signature dish at Bryant-Denny Stadium and many of the Dreamland locations.

Nacho chips drizzled with nacho cheese and topped with barbecue pulled pork, sliced jalapenos and Dreamland's famous sauce, stadium nachos are the No. 2 selling item in Bryant-Denny Stadium, just behind hot dogs. Stadium nachos originated in 2007.

'We wanted to have something unique, just for the stadium," said Matt Kilgore, operations manager for Dreamland. "We decided to come up with the nachos. They're handy and easy to make and to eat in the stadium."

Beyond the nachos, the Northport, Alabama, Dreamland location sells more than 500 pounds of meat and more than 2,000 slabs of ribs on a game day. Kilgore said Dreamland sells more slabs of ribs than they give away cups of water.





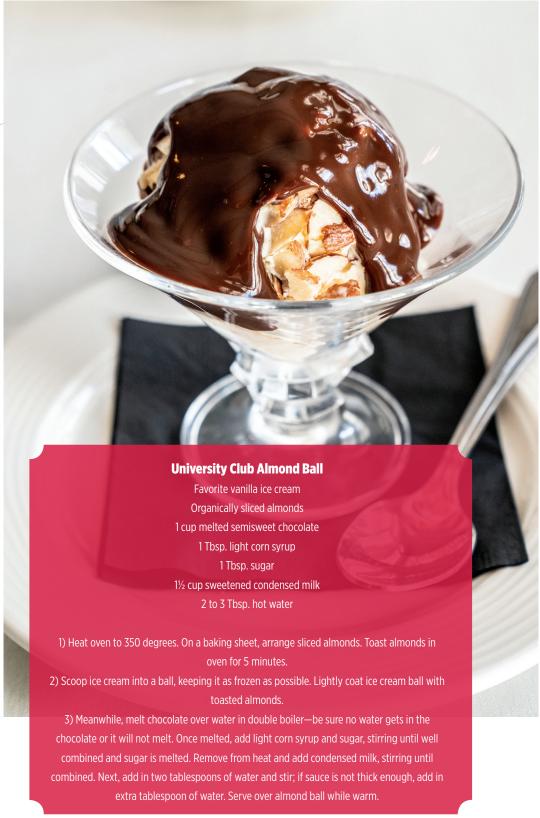
The University Club, which opened in 1944, is famous for classic Southern cuisine. Even more famous than the club itself is its signature dessert, the almond ball. Created in 1970s, the late longtime manager Alline P. Van Duzor was a stickler for this treat.

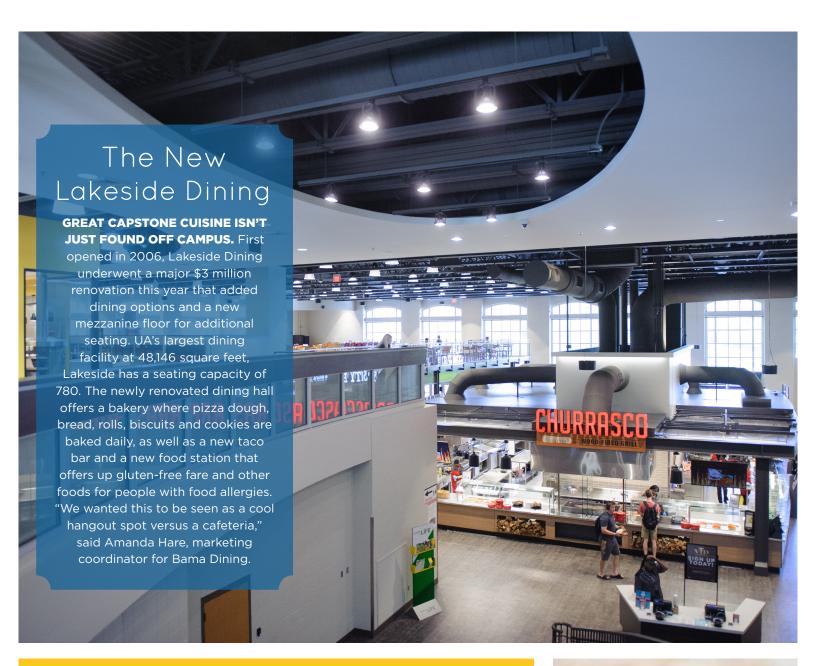
Dubbed the "perfect dessert," the vanilla ice cream coated in almonds and rich chocolate is the best way to end a meal. It's a serious business though, chef Cherri Koester said. Even the slightest change in size, consistency or flavor is noticed by guests, so much so that one person contacted the head of the College of Human Environmental Sciences and complained about the changes to the almond ball, making the club revert back to the original recipe a few years ago.

"We've made a few changes to the recipe, but the members are very set with this is how it's got to be," Koester said. "If you make too many changes, it creates havoc. It is very serious. You don't mess with the almond ball."

Every day, one of Koester's team helps scoop the ice cream and toss the ball into organically sliced almonds. The ice cream ball is frozen until the last second, when rich chocolate is drizzled before being presented to the lucky diner.

It's a treat you don't want to miss, along with the rest of the Capstone's iconic cuisine.





Top foods at Lakeside:

- 1. Chicken tenders
- 2. Ice cream
- **3.** Chocolate chip cookies

18,000

students per week visit, averaging about 2,600 per day.

14,000 slices of pizza

served weekly

Up to 6,000 burgers served daily

200 hotdogs served daily

