

Downtown Latté – Coffee Concoctions in a Friendly Atmosphere

Pam Burns and Connie Dick opened a dream in downtown Toledo's ever-expanding Warehouse District. Downtown Latté is open every day, except Sunday, for people who live or work downtown, and people like me who find it a great place for meeting business acquaintances. Men and women find the décor very inviting. There's artwork on the walls – an exhibit that changes every month – currently displaying Phyllis Lane's glass beadwork and paintings. At this time of year, the fireplace gives off a friendly glow. Even the restrooms are nicely decorated.

A dozen espresso coffee concoctions top the menu. Favorites are café mocha and café vanilla latté. Artistry is evident in the way that Brandy, the barista, prepares these specialty coffee drinks. When I mentioned that coffee ice cream is my weakness, they mentioned their frappes – freezes that are blended with ice and topped with whipped cream. Mocha freeze is at the top of my list and white mocha freeze (with white chocolate) is a close second. Downtown Latté uses only 1883 de Philibert Routin syrups, all-natural gourmet syrups imported from the French Alps, and Ghirardelli chocolates.

When a non-coffee drink is required, Italian and French sodas with 1883 syrups, hot and iced tea, lemonade, and orange juice are all quite popular with the crowd. A variety of smoothies, including the hip orange cremesicle, are typical afternoon and evening treats.

The good-looking crowd is faithful to Downtown Latté because of the food selections, too. Great baked goods are available every day – cookies, cakes, coffee cakes, muffins, bagels, scones, cinnamon twists, and biscotti. Many selections are baked in house; some are purchased from Daniel Holmes of Daniel's Confection at the Erie Street Market. He also produces unusual pizzas that have become a lunchtime favorite.

A nice selection of soups, salads, wraps, and sandwiches is also well received by the patrons. I was delighted with the Tuscany Tossed Salad with its mixed spring greens, dried cranberries, gorgonzola cheese, plenty of walnuts, Granny Smith apples, and topped with raspberry vinaigrette dressing. Freshly baked bread accompanies this specialty salad. Daily specials are noted on the charming chalk board.

A variety of live entertainment is featured several evenings every week. Tom Galvin with his acoustic guitar, satire, and humor will perform on Friday, December 10. Ed Levy, a University of Toledo professor, is often accompanied by his students and invites patrons to join in a jam session – December 2, 17, 23. Other local entertainers who perform at Downtown Latté include the folk group Ten Mile Creek, Martin Conrad with American standards on keyboard, and Java Jazz with Don Hales and Matt Pohlada.

All of the coffee at Downtown Latté is "fair trade, organic coffee, exceptional coffee purchased from farmers at a fair price to them." As noted in their menu, "a tasteful way to make the world a better place." This concern about the world and the people in it are

evident in the rapport that Pam and Connie have with their clientele. During my interview with them, several of the customers stopped by to chat with the owners. Keith Brown of the Bartley Lofts development team was happy to tell me, "I love this place. I'm here every day." We were also greeted by a first-time visitor who arrived in the Radisson van. The hotel recommended Downtown Latté to this out-of-town guest, and she appeared delighted to find such a trendy spot to purchase her tall café latté and a scone.

Their interest in providing a community-friendly location is also evident in the types of events that are hosted at their shop. New Urbanism meets the last Tuesday of every month with presentations about living in the city. Speakers with a variety of topics including finances, nutrition, divinity, servant leadership, and politics are on board several nights every month. Everyone is invited to attend.

Since its opening in mid-April, Connie Dick and Pam Burns have worked in their dream shop almost every hour that it has been open. Connie notes that "we wanted a place we'd like to frequent." Pam added that "we're happy to have a lot of interaction with our clientele. They tell us it's a nice getaway and it helps them de-stress." Their business is growing and new faces arrive every day – and they return.

The Warehouse District, just south of the Mud Hens' Fifth Third Field, is blooming with apartment and condo homes, shops, restaurants, and business offices. Downtown Latté helps bring all these folks together to meet each other and enjoy this developing neighborhood.

Downtown Latté, 44 South St. Clair in the Warehouse District, 419-243-6032.
Monday – Thursday, 7:00 a.m. – 8:00 p.m.; Friday, 7:00 a.m. – 11:00 p.m., Saturday,
9:00 a.m. – 11:00 p.m. Parking is available in front of and behind the restaurant.

article by D. Ellen Critchley
November 25, 2004