

DINING

What you need to know about the new Honeybird fried chicken restaurant in East Providence



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EAST PROVIDENCE — In one of the year's most anticipated restaurant openings, Honeybird Kitchen + Cocktails began serving dinner last week at 230 Massasoit Ave.

Just across from the Henderson Bridge, in a reimaged, former Getty gas station, restaurateurs Tracy and Nick Rabar opened their fourth business and first not to have the Avenue N name.

Serving modern Southern cuisine, Honeybird is all about fried chicken. There's a Blue Plate special with fried thigh and drumstick, but there are also tenders and wings and a bucket that combines all of it.

You can order original with a crispy crust made with a flour mix and spices. But you can also enjoy spicy Buffalo-flavor coating, Nashville Hot (an oil-based, cayenne-pepper coating), Cholula (hot honey sauce) and the unexpected Garlic Parmesan (perfect for a sandwich).

"Fried chicken is very American," said Nick Rabar. "But to produce high quality fried chicken takes a day and a half of preparation."

"It has to be crispy, tender and cooked all the way through," he said. Plus, it has to have the spices to make it delicious.

They tried more than 100 recipes to find a way for each piece of chicken to be delicately produced.

"It was an intense challenge," he said.

All the Honeybird chicken starts with a dry rub that sits on it for 24 hours. But each cut of the chicken is handled differently after that. Some pieces have a buttermilk bath while dark meat is cooked low and slow. Then it's flash fried for crispness.

Rabar said they developed a recipe book detailing the process for the kitchen staff led by chef German Cos. He's one of many longtime Avenue N employees at the new restaurant.

Honeybird is also all about the side dishes that pair oh-so-well with fried chicken. They include cornbread, creamed corn, pimento mac and cheese, cheesy cheddar grits, sweet potato tater tots, potlicker collard greens and mashed potatoes and gravy.

Snacks include Fried Okra, Hush Puppies and Fried Green Tomatoes. Appetizers of Fried Oysters, Hot Chicken Bao Buns and Andouille Sausage Pizza are also joined by Crispy Catfish Sliders.

This elevated comfort food menu has its roots in Avenue N's popular fried chicken that was offered for takeout when the pandemic hit in 2020. But that's only part of the story.

Southern Inspiration

When Rabar's son Jackson Rush went off to the College of Charleston in South Carolina, the whole family started a love affair with southern cooking.

Now Jackson has graduated and returned north to manage Honeybird. He brings with him, not only experience from working in Charleston restaurants but a love of the food.

"It's important to us to get it right," he said.

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In Charleston, you could enjoy delicious meals from guys who set up on the side of the road. Such is the deep culture of fine southern cooking.

The Details

Honeybird was 14 months in the making. The gas station had three bays and they closed one off during renovation to create the kitchen.

There are 52 seats at tables and a long bar with three TVs and a sound system that will allow guests to hear the calls of football games and other sports.

Next year they will work on patio seating, said Rabar.

The service at Honeybird is quicker than Avenue N, said Tracy Rabar. "But we will keep the same level of service just more casual. It will be refined but relaxed."

The Team at Honeybird

Emily Trodson is the corporate general manager and a longtime employee who welcomes the new concept.

"It's like learning a new language with the new food," she said adding she's happy for the change.

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Lesley Bolton is the corporate beverage director. With Trodson, she collaborated on an ambitious drink program with fun, creative cocktails divided into light and bright and dark and boozy.

On the light side, there's Side Chick made with Rhode Island Spirits Rhodium Gin, orange blossom honey and Topo Chico and more. There's also a White Peach Sangria and Cooped Up, a cocktail made with White Corn Whiskey.

On the boozier side, there's a Rodeo Julep, made with Balcones Blue Corn Whiskey, and Chicken Scratch, made with mezcal.

Bolton said they have added two draft units for Coors Light and Budweiser because they complement fried chicken. They are also great for watching a game, she said. They also offer Miller High Life Quickies. But you'll also find local brews, Chair 2, for example, on tap.

Details: Honeybird Kitchen + Cocktails, 230 Massasoit Ave., East Providence, (401) 919-5885, honeybirdri.com. Hours Tuesday to Thursday 4- 9 p.m.; Friday and Saturday 4 to 10 p.m. Closed Sunday and Monday.

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