

FOOD AND DRINK EVENTS

MAR 26 **Central Market Cooking Classes**

Tue

Central Market
REALLY INTO FOOD

MAR 28 **Baseball Opening Day Celebration**

at Clover Club Lawn

Live! by Loews Hotel - Arlington, TX Thu, 12:...

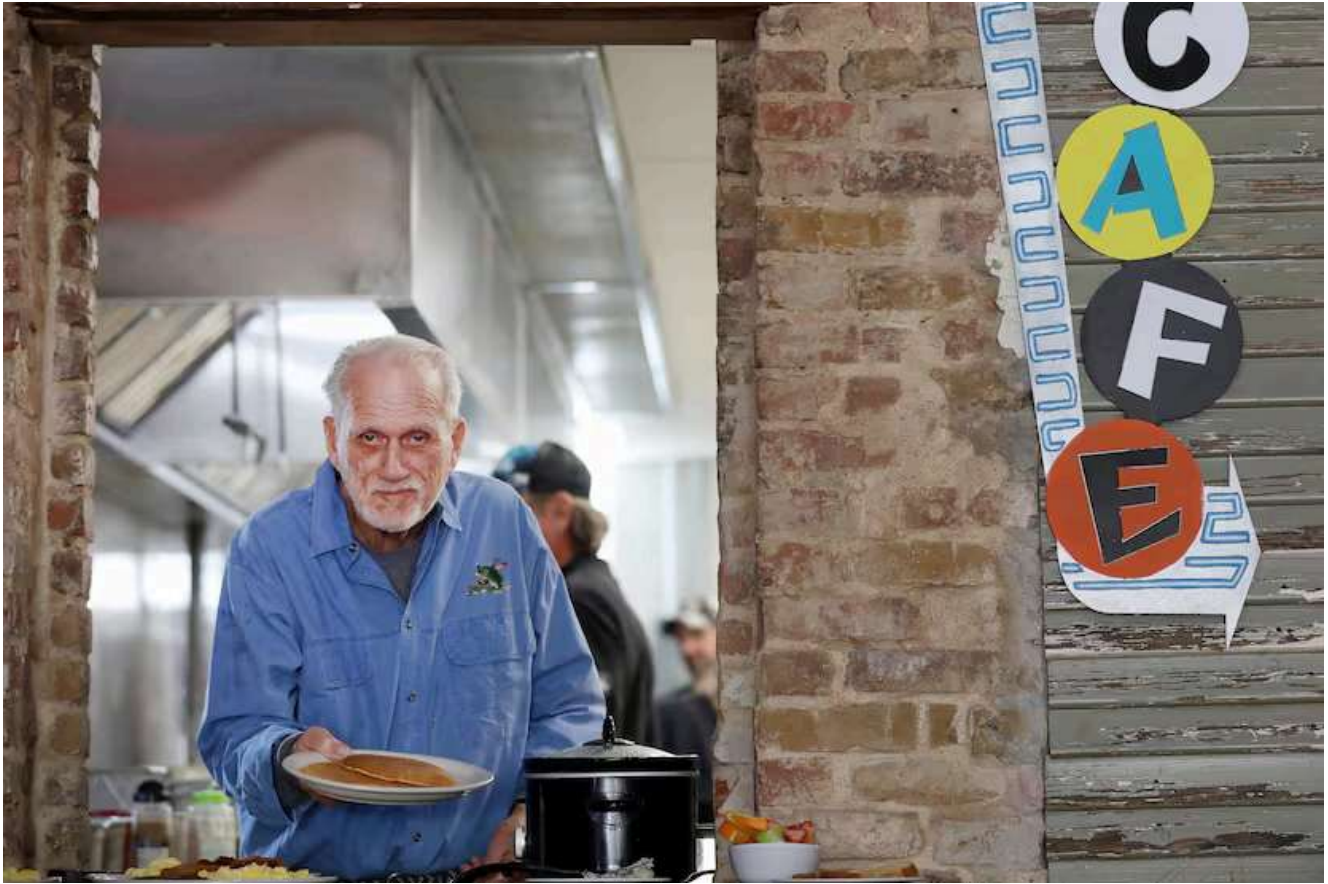
MAR 28

ADVERTISEMENT

FOOD > RESTAURANT NEWS

Historic Bill Smith's Cafe, a McKinney staple, reopens in new North Texas town

About 30 people waited outside before 5 a.m. on opening day, ready for breakfast in Van Alstyne.



At breakfasttime, 84-year-old restaurateur Bill Smith will probably be in the kitchen at his new Bill Smith's Cafe in Van Alstyne. (Anja Schlein / Special Contributor)

By [Sarah Blaskovich](#)

5:00 AM on Feb 6, 2024 — Updated at 5:19 PM on Feb 6, 2024



Hundreds of customers attended the small-town, high-profile [opening day at Bill Smith's Cafe in Van Alstyne Monday](#).

For many, it was a return to the omelets, biscuits and gravy, and chicken-fried steak that Bill Smith's Cafe served in McKinney for more than 65 years. [The restaurant — believed to be McKinney's oldest restaurant continuously owned by the same family — closed in 2022](#). Some feared owner Bill Smith would retire.

Smith laughs. Retirement is for "old guys," Smith said, sitting in his new restaurant on opening day.

At 84 years old, Smith is one of the oldest working restaurateurs in Dallas-Fort Worth. And Smith is a sought-after businessowner. After the McKinney cafe closed, Van Alstyne City Manager Lane Jones helped create incentives to entice Smith to relocate his beloved cafe 15 miles north, to a smaller town reminiscent of what McKinney used to be.

ADVERTISEMENT



Bill Smith's Cafe in Van Alstyne has a painted replica of the "cafe" sign that hung in McKinney for decades. (Anja Schlein / Special Contributor)

"Bill Smith's is an icon in North Texas. If you mention Bill Smith's [around here], people have either been there, their parents have been there, or their grandparents have been there," Jones said during the breakfast rush.

"Everybody knows Bill Smith."

Restaurant News

Get the scoop on the latest openings, closings, and where and what to eat and drink.

SIGN UP

Or with:



GOOGLE



FACEBOOK

By signing up you agree to our [Terms of Service](#) and [Privacy Policy](#).

Related Stories

[VIEW MORE >](#)

- [Why Lubellas Patisserie in East Dallas is a neighborhood success story](#)
- [Pizza joint Fortunate Son furthers new vision for downtown Garland](#)
- [Texas Rangers' new 2024 food: chicken-fried brisket taco, Korean pork and Whataburger](#)

On opening day, Smith woke up at 3 a.m., no alarm needed. He arrived in Van Alstyne's historic district at 3:30 a.m. to prep for the truckers and farmers he used to feed for years in McKinney. When Smith opened the door at 5 a.m., Jones said, about 30 people were waiting to be let in for coffee and pancakes.

“By the time we got to 6 a.m., it was completely packed,” the city manager said.



Bill Smith cooks breakfast in the kitchen of the new Bill Smith's Cafe in Van Alstyne. It opened at 5 a.m. Feb. 5, 2024. (Anja Schlein / Special Contributor)

The dining room was full of faces familiar to Smith. Many wore veterans' hats or shirts. Bill Cole, a McKinney resident, didn't mind the extra drive for a good breakfast.

“I haven't had a decent biscuit and sausage gravy since he left McKinney,” Cole said.

Cole gave a thumbs up to his generous plate of food and the reasonable prices — biscuits and gravy for \$4.25, omelets for \$8.75 to \$11.95, and platters with eggs, pancakes and bacon for \$9.95.

Smith's choice for a first-day breakfast was hearty chicken-fried steak and potatoes, eaten quickly just after 6 a.m.

ADVERTISEMENT



Mama Smith's Favorite is a ham steak, two eggs, and the option of biscuits and gravy or toast. (Anja Schlein / Special Contributor)

He's happiest in the kitchen, a place servers could hardly peel him out of for decades in McKinney. In Van Alstyne, Smith is back at the flattop. Customers can see him frying eggs as staffers shuttle in and out of the kitchen, arms full of red plastic baskets and white plates.

On opening day, three regulars finished their breakfasts and walked into the kitchen to make toast or wash dishes. Just to help.

"After 67 years, you make a lot of friends," Smith said.

Related: Why 83-year-old restaurateur Bill Smith will move his historic cafe to Van Alstyne

Small town significance

Van Alstyne had less than 3,000 residents when Jones became the city manager in 2018. Today it's home to about 7,700 people, and he projects the unincorporated areas and the town will amass 30,000 by 2030.

Bill Smith's Cafe is part of Van Alstyne's small-town growth story, Jones said.

In the past few years the city has spent more than \$5 million installing a downtown park and “central social district,” as Jones calls it, which can host festivals and concerts a block or two from Bill Smith’s and other small businesses.

In the past year, several boutiques, a grocery store and a distillery have opened in the historic district. As the streets are repaved, the area still has an old-town Texas feel, with brick buildings dating back to 1890 that are now coffee shops and clothing stores.

ADVERTISEMENT



Bill Smith talks to customers on opening day at his new restaurant. The historical district in Van Alstyne is a mix of longtime businesses like City Drug Company and new ones like Bill Smith's Cafe, which opened Feb. 5, 2024. (Anja Schlein / Special Contributor)

Bill Smith’s “cafe” sign, a colorful neon statement piece that hung on the side of the McKinney restaurant, isn’t up in Van Alstyne just yet. Smith saved the sign before the building in McKinney was bulldozed.

The city plans to display the 15-foot-tall sign on the cafe’s turfed patio, visible from Jefferson Street.

Smith sold some of the old signs and collectibles he had in his McKinney restaurant, to the tune of \$100,000 in profit, he said. A few Coca-Cola signs moved over to Van Alstyne, as did the cash register that dates back to 1909. The staff is grumbling about the new iPad next to it, used for credit card transactions.

Smith likes it in this small town.

ADVERTISEMENT

“I love it,” he said of being back in business. “People shake my hand, tell me they’re happy to be here. It feels like family.”

Bill Smith’s Cafe is at 233 E. Jefferson St., Van Alstyne.

For more food news, follow Sarah Blaskovich on X (formerly Twitter) at [@sblaskovich](https://twitter.com/sblaskovich).



[Sarah Blaskovich](#), Senior Food Reporter. Sarah writes about restaurants, bars and culture in Dallas. Follow [@sblaskovich](#) on Twitter and ask her what to do, where to eat or where to drink in your area.

[✉ sblaskovich@dallasnews.com](mailto:sblaskovich@dallasnews.com) [f /sarah.blaskovich](#) [X @sblaskovich](#) [@sarahblaskovich](#)

TOP PICKS



Deadly Fake

30 Days Inside Fentanyl's Grip on North Texas



DFW Airport turns 50

One of America's key aviation hubs, then and now