

My friend Dennis Drake was in for lunch and said something that got me to thinking. He referred to how good downtown Opelika was looking. Then he talked about all the restaurants around these days.

You know he's right. It may be hard to believe but there are several dining options in downtown Opelika. There are a few more within a couple of blocks, too.

Let's take a look at what the options are and what these places are doing these days.

One of the oldest places around is the Breezeway. It's in the 200 block of South 8th Street. The Breezeway offers chicken tenders, wings, sandwiches and salads. They have plenty of dine-in options and an active take out business.

Breezeway serves lunch and dinner every day.

Another casual sandwich place is Cottage Cafe. It's in the center of the 800 block of South Railroad Avenue. They serve sandwiches, salads and a special dessert from a counter.

Cottage Cafe serves lunch Monday through Saturday.

In the same block you will find Red Door June. This is primarily a coffee spot with all sorts of variety. They have snacks for breakfast and serve a light lunch everyday. On Sundays there is a plate lunch available.

Next year there's supposed to be an Irish pub opening in the same block - in the old pharmacy building on the corner. Work has already begun.

Of course Eighth and Rail is in this block too. Richard Patton's long established bar offers desserts at night along with a full selection of potables. Live entertainment happens on some weekends.

The Rail is open at night only.

Go over to the 900 block of South Railroad and you will find a new place- Alpen Cafe and Bakery. They are serving German cuisine. They have traditional sausages, schnitzel and sauerbraten. On Sundays they

also have some brunch items. Alpen has a number of imported beers with some on draught.

Alpen serves lunch everyday except Monday and dinner Wednesday through Saturday.

If you go to the 100 block of 8th Street, you will find the long-time resident Cafe 123. John Robert Wood is the current proprietor. Cafe 123 has expanded its menu. They have a very successful approach to Continental cuisine with a Southern flare. This is an attractive upscale atmosphere with a full bar.

Cafe 123 serves dinner Tuesday through Saturday. Reservations are accepted.

Next door is the newest place - 8th Street Cafe. They have a full bar that is open for Monday night football. Their focus is burgers, sandwiches and salads.

8th Street Cafe serves lunch everyday and dinner Wednesday through Saturday.

Down toward the railroad and across the street is Jimmy's. Their slogan is "fine dining in the New Orleans tradition." It's up-scale evening fare with an emphasis on seafood.

Lunch at Jimmy's has that same sort of feel but with the addition of the typical Southern plate lunch of a main course and a couple of sides. Specialty salads, sandwiches and soups round out the menu.

Jimmy's serves lunch everyday including weekends and dinner Tuesday through Saturday. Reservations are accepted.

You can't talk about downtown Opelika dining without mentioning Chuck's Barbecue. Chuck Ferrell has been dishing up some of the finest for over 30 years. His place is on Short Avenue and Tenth Street. Chuck's family also operates Jim Bob's on First Avenue.

If you travel on down to Geneva Street, you will find Whispering Oaks. The dean of the all, Brad Boling, is still serving breakfast and lunch at Tyler's.

Another barbecue legend is Papa Joe's on Second Avenue. Folks still go in there and order a Big B Special even though the name changed 20 years ago.

Second Avenue is also the home of a Wendy's and Burger location. My friend Hal Smith serves food along with his fellowship at his store on the same street. And just off Second Avenue on 6th Street is a KFC.

So the next time you get a hankerin' for some fine food, give downtown Opelika a thought. There are enough places there to be able to go and park. Then you can figure out which spot to go to this time.

Speaking of parking, there's plenty of it in downtown Opelika. Thanks to the Mayor and City Council's vision, things are looking great. There's plenty of nice landscaping and lots of light at night. If you haven't been recently, you are in for a nice surprise.

Independently owned restaurants don't follow a corporate time line. They change their menus and approaches in response to their customers' requests. Sometimes their hours of operation vary. So it's a good idea to call ahead and make sure. Even if a restaurant does not normally accept reservations, call them anyway, especially if you have more than four in your party. That way they can get a table set for you and things will be easier when you arrive.

Next Friday marks an "On the Tracks" celebration in downtown Opelika. At this very popular event, several restaurants will have food available in the common area on South Railroad Avenue. There are a number of locations for tasting wines, too. The downtown restaurants will be open for regular business as well. It promises to be an entertaining evening.