



# Havana turns up heat on hamburgers

**SENTINEL STAFF REPORTS**

Not only is it America's favorite sandwich, but the sandwich of favorite Americans, too, and it's taking center stage on Havana Street for the month of May.

It's National Burger Month, and to celebrate the occasion a host of Havana Street restaurants are offering specials, contests and boasting their burger best.

President Barack Obama and Vice President Joe Biden took a short — but wholly noticeable — motorcade ride May 5 from the White House to a small, independent burger joint called Ray's Hell Burger in Virginia.

The two leaders went right up to the counter where the meat was being grilled and ordered.

Each fetched cash from his pocket and paid, and then the pair stood like the rest and waited for their number

to be called before going to a table.

The restaurant, which prides itself on premium aged 10-ounce burgers, sits in a small strip plaza. The burgers sell for \$6.95.

Local burger barbers say all Americans, not just those in D.C., know a good thing when they eat it.

During all of May, 23 participating restaurants on and near Havana Street are offering weekly drawings for \$50 gift certificates and a grand prize drawing at the end of May for a four-burner gas grill.

"It's going to be a lot of fun," said Havana Business Improvement District Executive Director Gayle Jetchick. She said the burgers she's been trying at places like The Aurora Summit and several others have been more than rewarding.

Gift certificates to participating restaurants will be awarded each weekend, and the gas grill donated by Lowe's will be given away from drawing entries by May 31.

## The Summit Steakhouse

2700 S. Havana St.  
303-751-2112  
Lunch and dinner

General Manager Michael Ford at Aurora Summit Steakhouse on South Havana Street and East Yale Avenue said that while the Aurora mainstay has long been known for steaks, the chophouse serves quite a few burgers.

"We do them for lunch ... and we've had a bar menu for years and years, so we've been making them for quite a while," said Ford.

Oddly enough, Ford said, because the Summit serves delicious steaks, the trimmings from those steaks serve as the foundation for great burgers.

"Our burgers are from our meat," Ford said. "So it's the trimmings from the prime beef that we serve all day."

That's right. Burgers made from filet mignons and T-bone steaks. Coupled with freshly baked buns that arrive from a baker each day, Ford said, and you have the makings for one delicious sandwich.

Ford said the staff at Summit don't have to add any seasoning to the hamburger after it's been ground, the natural flavor and juices do just fine.

"There's no reason, it's good as is," he said.

While the general manager said he prefers his burger medium, the toppings vary.

"Sometimes I'll put a portobello mushroom on there," he said.

The steakhouse offers a wide variety of toppings, including blue cheese, bacon, guacamole, serrano peppers and the old standbys, ketchup and mustard.

The burgers are cooked on a gas broiler, he said, sealing in flavor and juices of the meat.

"You can't beat it," he said.

## Johnny's Diner

2323 S. Havana St.  
303-369-8307  
Daily 5:30am-3:30pm

Usually, Chris Corcoran opts for the pastrami burger when he eats at Johnny's Diner.

Corcoran, a cook at the 1950s-



Michael Palmer, employee at Johnny's Diner, serves food May 5 at Johnny's Diner in Aurora.

style diner at Havana and Iliff, said the burger — always made to order with fresh ingredients — comes piled high with slices of pastrami.

"I like the pastrami," he said.

But sometimes, when his appetite is big, Corcoran said he goes for one of the most-popular items on Johnny's menu: the giant burger.

With a half pound of fresh rolled, charbroiled, ground beef, the massive burger is tough to beat, he said.

And, after dining on a giant burger, hunger pangs tend to keep their distance for a good long while.

"After one of those, you're good for about four hours," he said.

Johnny's has long been a staple on Aurora's restaurant scene, famous for its massive burgers, shakes and decor that looks like it came from a James Dean movie.

And for as long as Johnny's has been around, the burgers have been a staple on the menu.

Corcoran said the diner's breakfast items are always popular, but even they don't compare to the popularity of Johnny's burgers.

"The burgers are by far the most popular," he said.

The freshness of the burgers as well as the variety, including a Santa Fe burger with green chile and salsa and the pastrami burger, are what make Johnny's stand out, he said.

"It's definitely the freshness," he said.

## Sam's No. 3 Aurora

Southeast corner of  
Parker and Havana  
303-751-0347

Breakfast, lunch and dinner daily

Sam's takes the art of burger making seriously. The iconic restaurant has credited big juicy burgers for

much of its success for generations. The serious part is about paying attention to details, says Sam's No. 3 owner Patrick Armatas.

"Everything has to be fresh," Armatas said. First off, ground prime chuck is ordered specially from Denver's Anderson Meats and delivered daily. It's the perfect 80-20 mix, he said, meaning that it has 20 percent fat content.

Armatas believes that makes for the perfect burger. Any leaner and you miss out on that juicy mouth feel that makes American hamburgers the treat they're known for.

Big comes next. Sam's burgers are fat and juicy and take more than a half-pound of burger to start so aficionados get a half-pound of meat after it's cooked. The burgers are seared first on a griddle to seal in the juices, then finished on the broiler to get that grilled taste.

"Just a little flame flicker makes a big difference," Armatas said.

Next comes any one or more of dozens of toppings, including cheeses, mushrooms, chilies and other meats and vegetables. The possibilities are nearly endless on the menu.

His favorite is the Mexiburger — a Sante Fe-style creation on a flour tortilla smothered in cheese and green chile.

The burgers are finished off with a fresh bun, also delivered daily, and crunchy fries.

Sam's has two specials honoring National Burger Month. Every burger on the menu is \$1 off this month, and Sam's chefs are offering a different burger du jour each day. One recently featured breakfast burger was made with a sausage patty and two fried eggs over the top — perhaps over the top being the key phrase there.

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