

## Little Chefs feels like family

By **MYRA CARPENTER**  
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The Little Chefs Diner has been located at 147 East Market St. in downtown New Albany since December 1957. It has 10 stools at a Formica counter and is reminiscent of another era in America when diners dotted the country. The name was chosen because that is the model of the prefabricated building.

Diana Curtsinger, owner/manager for the past 16 years, said, "I attribute the longevity of Little Chefs to my regular customers."

"We are like a family. I know what many customers are going to order as soon as they step through the door. We are open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. We're here anytime someone wants to stop by."

Breakfast and lunch are served 24 hours a day, Curtsinger said.

"We have anything you'd like for breakfast except waffles," she said.

"In addition to the sandwiches, we have a luncheon special and soup Monday - Friday."

One special is spaghetti with meat sauce and a salad. One of the soups is cream of broccoli.

"Everything is homemade," Curtsinger said. "We deliver to a five-block area during lunch."

Tony Kessinger of New Albany is a regular customer who has been eating at Little Chefs for 20 years. He listed some of his favorite homemade desserts: "cherry cheesecake, brownies, banana pudding and dream-sicle pie."

"When you order a pancake, you only need one, Kessinger said. "They are the size of hub caps."

"This is a good place to eat. I stop in whenever I can," Greg Hunt of Jeffersonville, a customer for only six months, said.

Why do the regulars keep coming back? "They have the best coffee in town - and the food is good," Raleigh Sutton of New Albany, who has been eating at Little Chefs for eight years, said.

"They are open 24 hours a day. They are nice people, and I enjoy the camaraderie," Bill Crosley of New Albany, a six-year-customer, said.

"Also, you get a segment of all types of people."

Amanda Lockman is Curtsinger's daughter and a waitress at Little Chefs. She said she loves her job -- and has a smile for each customer who comes through the door.

"The customers are part of my family. I could never leave and go some place else to work," she said.

Lockman pointed out a set of photo albums that are kept behind the counter so



Photo by Myra Carpenter

**Dennis Backherms of Jeffersonville and Tony Kessinger of New Albany are served by Amanda Lockman at Little Chefs Diner in New Albany.**

customers can look at them anytime they wish. The albums contain pictures of men, women and children - people of all ages. Some pictures were taken at the diner, and some are of birthday and anniversary celebrations, picnics, award or ceremonies taken at other locations.

"We keep albums of photos, newspaper clippings and notes from our customers,

Lockman said. "We started doing that in 1999 and are currently working on the third one."

Kessinger pointed out the restaurant also keeps a birthday calendar for customers.

"When a birthday rolls around, we all sign a card to be sent," Kessinger said.

The name, address and room number of a patient in a rehabilitation hospital post-

ed by the front door -- inviting anyone interested to send a card or drop by -- gave further evidence of "family."

The diner has a variety of customers. Aside from the regulars, people who stay at the downtown motels frequently stop by.

For instance, a couple in town from Ft. Wayne for the Kentucky State Fair came for breakfast.

Little Chefs is also featured in The Entertainment Book and on WNAS (New Albany High School's radio station), both of which bring in new customers.

When asked about hobbies or outside interests, Curtsinger said, "Managing Little Chefs takes my full attention. I don't have a hobby, but my grandchildren are what I really enjoy."

All that and a NASCAR room

## Ninny's serves variety to late-night customers

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If ordinary restaurants have you wishing for more variety in your dining experience, look no further than Ninny's-N-New Albany.

Located at 506 West Main St., Ninny's offers a wide variety of amenities to its patrons.

Since being established by Brenda Hoover in July 2000, Ninny's has offered breakfast platters, lunch combos, dinner platters, and even a weekend breakfast buffet, all of which offer a substantial amount of items to choose from.

Lisa Cochran, an employee since March 2001, is particularly fond of Ninny's cheeseburger, but said that breakfast foods are the most popular amongst the customers.

"The western omelet or our huge pancakes are the most popular," Cochran said.

In addition to the breakfast, lunch, and dinner items, Ninny's offer's milkshakes in seven different flavors to help wash down what Cochran says is "the best home cooking this side of the Mississippi."

Cochran suggested said that a wide range of people dine at Ninny's, at various hours of the day.

"We are a popular hang-out for police and firefighters," Cochran said.

"When the bars close at 3:30 a.m., people come in for breakfast."

Customers traveling east-bound from Caesar's Riverboat also frequent Ninny's, especially casino employees.

"We get more of the employees than the patrons," Cochran said.

Cochran also said he believes that Ninny's has been a popular diner for Indiana University Southeast students.

Charles Caffey, who was a first time visitor to Ninny's, was impressed.

"It is a down-to-earth type of place," Caffey said.

"Like stepping back in time to small town diner."

Caffey was also surprised to see that most expensive platter on the menu was only \$7.99.

The down-to-earth type atmosphere of Ninny's can be credited to employees such as Cochran, and Donna Broughton, an office manager and daughter of the owner.

"Meeting and greeting all the people is the best thing about this job," Broughton said.

Broughton and Cochran are two of eight employees working at Ninny's. However, Hoover, the owner, has no problem helping her employees out.

"She cooks; she does it all," Cochran said.

Although Broughton enjoys the occasional day off, she is still proud of the work she does.

"I have made my mom proud," Broughton said.

Ninny's features an interesting layout, offering its customers three separate eating areas.

Aside from the traditional bar that have made late night diners famous, Ninny's offers two other themes.

"We have a 50's room and a NASCAR room," Cochran said.

The 50's room is situated in the front of Ninny's and features various records and photographs from the time period.



Photos by Sean Vanderhoff

**Top: Renata Vickery, a waitress at Ninny's, serves up some of their biscuits and gravy during their morning rush.**

**Bottom: Donnie Parrott, a waiter at Ninny's, serves up some morning coffee for one of their many regular customers.**

The NASCAR room is located right of the bar and kitchen. In addition to the NASCAR room, racing fans can also see the various trophies of Russell Broughton, a driver at the Sportsdrome Speedway in Jeffersonville.

Restaurant hours at Ninny's are broad, opening early for breakfast and closing late for dinner.

It also stays open 24 hours on to accommodate those who choose to eat late

on Friday and Saturday nights.

However, the late nights aren't the busiest hours for Ninny's.

"Day shift is busiest, between 8 a.m. and 1:30 p.m.," said Cochran, who routinely reports to work at 6 a.m.

With the various menu items, room themes, and hours of operation, Ninny's separates itself from the ordinary.

## Local restaurant offers authentic Mexican food

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Red, white and green.

Yes, that's correct. These colors represent the Mexican flag and the outside of an authentic restaurant nearby. Chaquito's, named after the owner, Paul Chaquito, has been open since Aug. 8, at 624 Cherry Street in New Albany.

The menu is very detailed and contains items from "apertivos," or appetizers to the desserts.

There is a helpful section on the menu that gives a description of Mexican food. The majority of the menu is authentic Mexican food; however, there are some American influences as well.

The children's menu includes enchiladas and quesadillas to chicken nuggets and pepperoni pizza.

Terry and Kathy Lange, customers for nine years at a previous restaurant where Chaquito worked, said, "We have had everything on the menu!"

"When he left, we followed," Terry said.

"The people and food are great," said Kathy.

Leticia Jaimes, who has been a server at Chaquito's for a month, said, "My favorite food on the menu is chicken fajitas."

Jaimes also recommends the fried ice cream, a "homemade ice cream with a corn-flake crumble, your choice of topping and whipped cream" — for those who can make it to the desserts.

The staff is bilingual, so you can order in either Spanish or English.

All of the selections are a great value. The soft drinks are only \$1.35 and the size of a 32-ounce drink.

As far as the food, you might as well ask for a take-out box when you order.

The restaurant has a full service bar and big screen television for boxing matches.

There is also a room with a stage that is used for special occasions — and which Chaquito wants to use as a dance hall in the future.

He also hopes to add a dance floor soon with a live band.

"I want to expand to a better location," Chaquito said with a smile.



Photo by Alicia M. Johnson

**Two patrons enjoy the Mexican fare at Chaquito's, located in New Albany.**