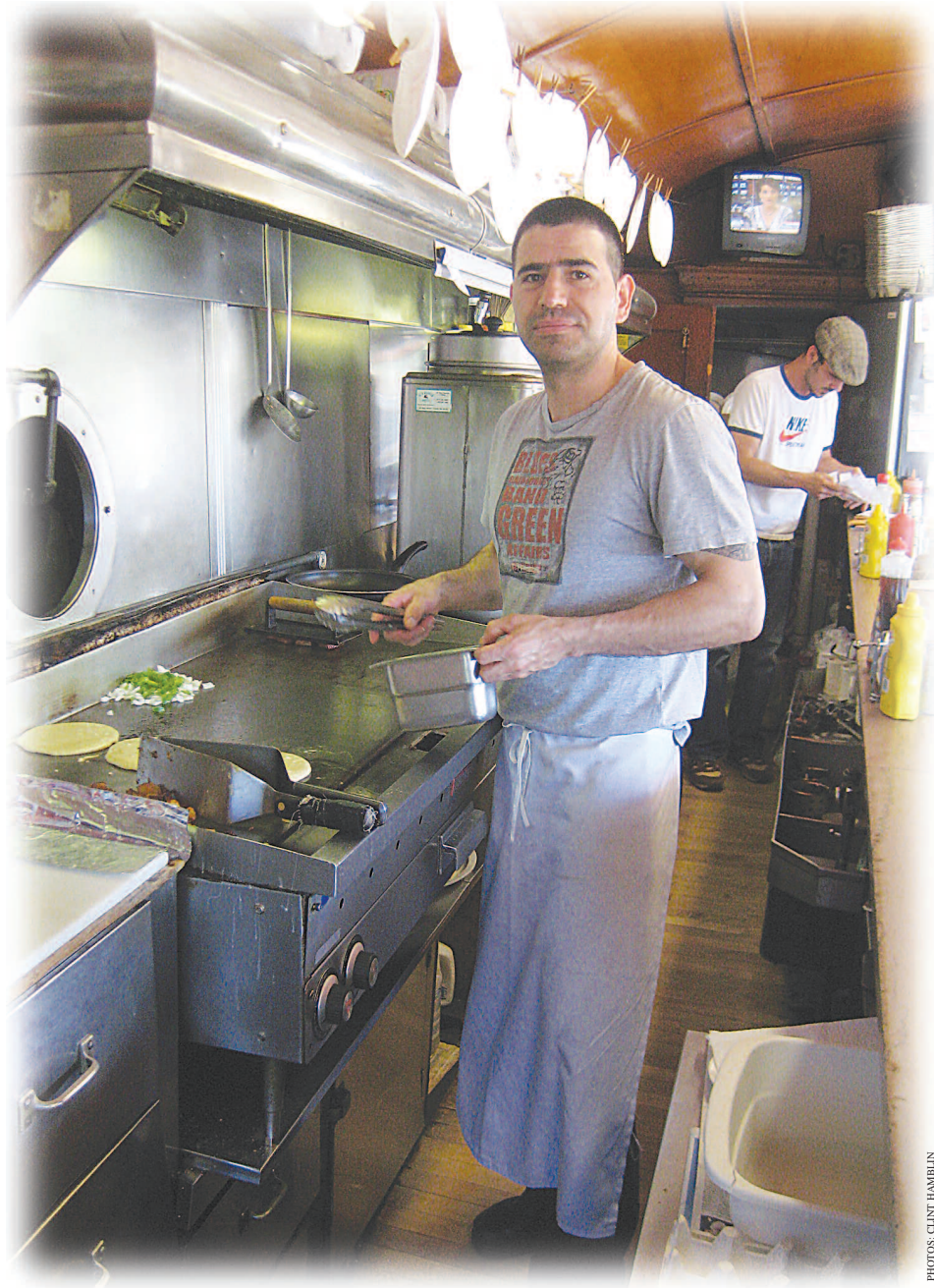


Clint Eats



BY CLINT HAMBLIN



José the grill cook at Buddy's

I'll have two poached eggs, soft not runny, on an English muffin, with sausage links, crispy home fries, blueberry pancakes with powdered sugar, butter, lots of maple syrup and a tall glass of milk.

In the 1950s folks paid about \$1.95 for this almost obscene breakfast special, and today's price is almost as good as it was 50 years ago. Diners, those unique American restaurants many of us frequented when we were kids, are still around. And considering the cost of eating out these days, the values are outstanding.

The South Street Diner

This Boston landmark was built in 1947 primarily to serve local factory workers. Solomon Sidell has owned it for the past 13 years. Located at 178 Kneeland Street in the Leather District, The South Street Diner is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, so you can order anything at any time.

"The menu rarely changes," Sidell said. "When a special becomes popular, it goes on the menu."

The Banana Stuffed French Toast, egg-coated bread fried in butter and stuffed with sliced bananas, is as easy to swallow as the \$8 price. For \$9, the Cuban sandwich is stuffed with ham, sliced chicken

and cheese then grilled so it all melts together. The \$10 Steak Bomb is filled with steak served with grilled onions, peppers, mushrooms and barbecue sauce. Both sandwiches are served with the best crispy French fries. The sandwiches are so huge, you might want to eat half and take the other half home.

Buddy's

Formerly known as Buddy's Truck Stop, this diner has been in operation since 1929.

"On this past April 11, we celebrated our third year," said new Buddy's owner Nicole Bairos. "But this year the diner is celebrating 80 years in business."

The train-car styled diner functioned in Leominster, Massachusetts until 1951, before it was moved to 113 Washington Street in Somerville. There are no tables, just counter space with very wobbly stools.



The South Street Diner

Seat belts might help you steady yourself as you savor the terrific food made by José, the grill cook.

"He's a master at preparing several dishes all at the same time," Bairos said, "I don't know what I'd do without him."

José makes perfectly poached eggs served with Linguica, a grilled Portuguese sausage, home fries and toast all for \$5.95, but don't expect to find that information on a traditional menu. Everything is written on paper plates and hung over the grill across the restaurant.

"When we have a special, up goes the paper plate with all the details," Bairos said. "And nothing here costs more than \$10 - that's the rule."

Who frequents Buddy's? During the week, it's the construction workers, city workers and truck drivers. On the weekend, it's the young neighborhood professionals and students, and because there's a Mercedes dealership nearby, Buddy's is the place to go while the car is being serviced.

Mike's Diner

"When I first applied for the job almost 14 years ago, I wasn't sure I wanted to work in this neighborhood," said Barbara Benatuil, the charming general manager of Mike's, located on 1714 Washington Street

in the South End. "It was early morning and there were so many hookers working the streets, I was afraid to go into the diner."

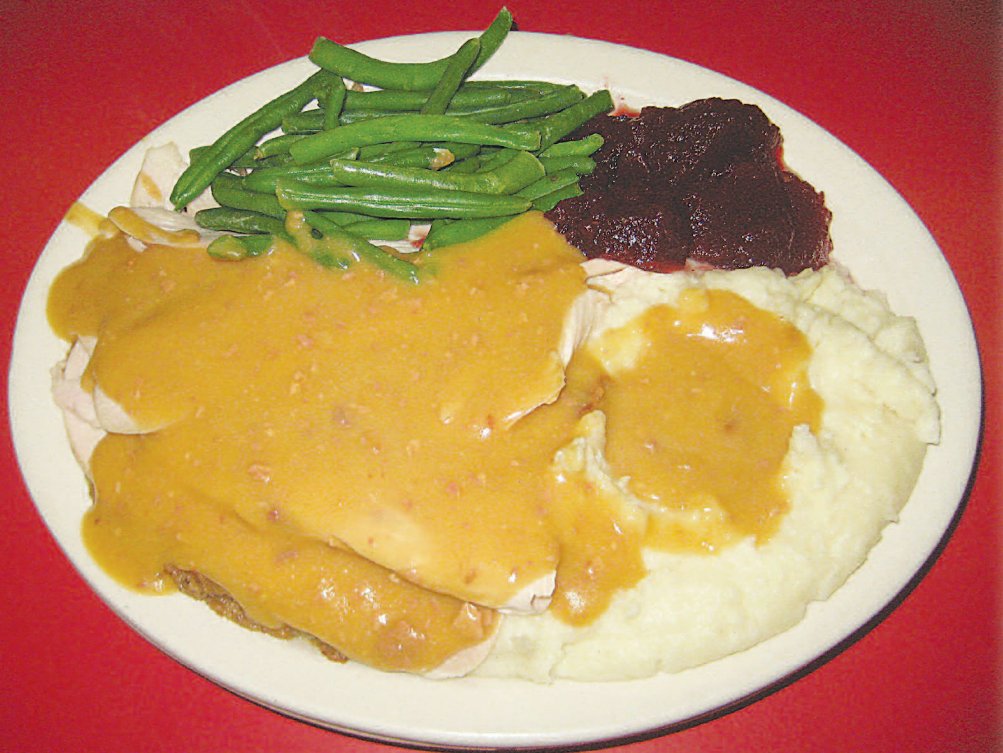
But the neighborhood has evolved dramatically over the years. The hookers are gone, and the clientele has changed.

"Mayor Menino comes in all the time," Benatuil said. Photos of politicians, including former president Bill Clinton, and other famous people line the walls of the restaurant.

When asked what sells the best, Benatuil replied, "Honey, it's turkey dinner! We cook two 26-pound turkeys every day." The turkey dinner plate is huge, served with a mountain of mashed potatoes, sliced and very moist turkey with stuffing hidden underneath, green beans, cranberry sauce and the lightest and most delicious gravy covering the turkey and potatoes. At \$9.95, it's comfort food at its best.

On the weekend, Mike's Diner only serves breakfast, and the lines go out the door and down the street. "Diners, Drive-ins and Dives," the Food Network's popular television show, did a feature on Mike's Diner, increasing business whenever it's run.

"Hungry people call us from the airport asking for directions," Benatuil said.



The turkey dinner at Mike's Diner

PHOTOS: CLINT HAMBLIN