



It's a cornucopia of coffee beans 'n' treats at the Firefly Coffee House.

There's always been a need for such a place. A hangout, a hot spot, a neighborhood joint ... call it what you will. It's a place where teenagers can see and be seen, friends can relax together, deals can be made, first dates can unfold. Less intimate than a home, more comfortable than a conference room, open to all.

In days past, such a place might have been a park, a roller-skating rink, the nearby soda fountain or the corner bar. People got together to do lunch or have a drink. Teens would loiter at the mall.

But one type of place increasingly serves a variety of needs across generational lines. The coffeehouse, still a novelty in Fort Wayne 10 years ago, now functions as the spot for social transactions.

It makes perfect sense: Atmospheres are inviting. Prices aren't intimidating. There isn't the connota-

Whole Latte Love

By Julianne Will
Photos by Rob Borel

tion associated with going to someone's home or a nightclub. In fact, there's little social regimen at all to one's time in a coffeehouse. Perhaps that's why so many have found it meets their own requirements.

But each coffeehouse has a personality, just as its owners do. And that is reflected in its clientele, as well as its décor, drinks, entertainment and events. Fort Wayne is home to a surprising cacophony of coffeehouse personalities — meaning there is the perfect spot for everyone.

Espresso Gallery

Espresso Gallery, in southwest Fort Wayne, welcomes an ever-changing stream of customers each day. “We have such a great mix of people,” says Kari Romey, who owns Espresso Gallery with her husband, Doug.

Teens come in before school, after school and on weekends. Soccer moms gather and chat after they get their kids off to school. Ladies of a certain age visit in the afternoons. Classmates stop by together after sessions at the nearby yoga center. And thanks to Espresso Gallery's new DSL ports and wireless Internet access, business people come in all day for small meetings or to con-



The space-age meets the humble coffee bean at the Espresso Gallery, where Hubble telescope technology ensures that each bag is roasted to perfection.



At-once upscale and affordable, The Espresso Gallery is a great way to wind down the day. Or to begin one, for that matter.



Harkening to the days of the great folk singers and beat poets, Toast and Jam is funky, upbeat and inviting. And developing a national following, too.

duct interviews. “We have a real steadiness,” Romey says of the business.

Customers also appreciate the ambiance, which could be described as jazzy, sophisticated and striking. Artwork for sale on the walls comes from a company out of Atlanta. The quiet interior was professionally designed, and includes hand-painted tabletops. Live jazz and acoustic music on weekends complements the mood. It’s polished and oh-so-hip, much like the regulars.

Naked Clay Café

The feeling at Naked Clay Café in northeast Fort Wayne is a bit quieter, casual and creative. Customers only leave the comfortable seating on one side of the shop to satisfy curiosity about what’s happening with the pottery on the other. Naked Clay Café existed as a ceramics studio in the Marketplace of Canterbury for three years before Dave and Rhonda Bennett moved to Washington Square and added a coffee shop two years ago.

“Our clientele is a little bit older than most,” says Dave Bennett. There are few high school students and more thirty- and forty-somethings. Many pastors host church-group meetings

there, and the space is often used by insurance or investment brokers, real estate agents and the like for one-on-one business meetings. A new lunch menu fosters daytime collaboration there.

The ceramics studio adds a whole other dimension. Rhonda is developing packages for birthday parties, bridal

showers, corporate team-building packages and more. Anything you can think of, “there’s pretty much a party type for it,” Dave Bennett says. Naked Clay Café is also great for a date — sipping mochas and painting pottery gives you something to fill those awkward voids.

Toast and Jam

Creatives with a lyrical bent have found a haven downtown at Toast and Jam. “It’s kind of like the central networking place for musicians,” says Jill Mozena, who opened the coffee-house five-and-a-half-years ago with husband Al.

Wednesday is open stage night, and the first Thursday of the month from September through December is open poetry reading night. Groups of all ages come to watch or muster courage. Most nights there’s just a \$1 cover.

Toast and Jam’s setting, a completely restored 1888 Victorian house, helps visitors feel at home. The tile and woodwork are original, and lace curtains hang in the windows. There is a sofa in the “rug room,” so named for the rug painted on the wood floor.



The Naked Clay Café, where you can make a pot AND a pot of coffee.

Church pews provide additional seating.

Patrons here aren't holding meetings, though; rather, they're savoring a shared experience: "We have a quiet audience. Here, we focus on the music. This is a listening room, for the public and musicians," Mozena says.

Dash-In

Another group has found its favorite "perch" downtown, too. Legal eagles flock to the Dash-In, says owner John Podzielinski. Many attorneys make it their first stop of the day, he says, and "we have a close relationship with the judges at the courthouse. The judges have adopted this place. More than three or four use this place as their gathering place. A lot of them hold their meetings here."

The Dash-In's full menu makes it the hot spot midday. "We see a lot of business taking place at the tables dur-



Lunch at the Dash-In is a preferred downtown gathering spot for many.



Youth is served at the Higher Grounds, where a cuppa' joe, a brisk autumn eve and good friends come to meet.

In Our January/February Issue You'll Find...

What Fort Wayne is
doing to fight its battle
of the waistline bulge.

How to stay warm
while looking oh-so-cool.

Fifty years
of the Big Boy.

The latest hot spots
for spring vacations

Plus all our regular profiles
and features of local
personalities who make
Fort Wayne great; in-depth
looks at our arts, dining
entertainment and sports
activities; must-see
day-trips and excursions;
and the latest trends
in home design.



Fort Wayne
MAGAZINE



There's a cozy, artsy appeal to the Firefly, where local artists display and sell their work.

ing the lunch hour," Podzielinski says. The historic building, with its high ceilings and brick, is a popular escape all afternoon, too. Downtown professionals like to get away from the phones, "get out and get some fresh air and stretch their legs and come over here."

Firefly Coffee House

What about Fort Wayne's vibrant neighborhoods, you ask? The Firefly Coffee House is at the center of its near-northeast community, a mix of socio-economic groups, races and ethnicities. "My dreams have come true. I really wanted to get all people, and I have," says owner Cyndi Demaree.

Professionals, high schoolers, college students, families and retirees all make the Firefly a part of their day. They come to hear the live music, or to make use of the board games in the cozy seating area in back. Homework is done between music sets or mocha sips. The Firefly also offers wireless Internet access for those who have a card. "More and more people are bringing in their laptops," Demaree said.

Higher Grounds

Higher Grounds coffeehouse may

be one of the few to actually spawn its own groups. One is a bunch of regulars with nothing more in common initially than showing up at the same time every day. The other is a collection of former Central Catholic students. "That's been really fun. It's like a mini-reunion," says Kim Richards, who owns the business with her husband, John.

They're just one of many clusters who gather 'round tables in the warm, coffee-toned dining room of the St. Joe Village location. Mothers of Preschoolers discussion groups, neighborhood association committees and youth groups all make use of the space. High school friends spill out to patio tables in warm weather. Wireless Internet access facilitates business meetings there. And the shop recently added a kids' table. "We've tried really hard to make it accommodating to everyone," Richards says.

She, like her fellow coffeehouse proprietors, loves the business that puts her in the heart of a community. "It's just like this little family," Richards says. "The world gets a little smaller."

And a good cup of coffee makes it that much sweeter.